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OLIVER BEAUMONT. <sup>E</sup> 39

AND

LORD LATIMER.

BY

LADY EMILY PONSONBY,

AUTHOR OF

“THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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## OLIVER BEAUMONT.

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### CHAPTER XXXII.

ROSAMOND had promised to go to Nettlethorpe, to see the working of Dorothy's plans before she went home. A day or two after this dinner, a friend of Mr. Parry's, who was going North for a short time, offered to take her there, and call for her on his return. She was glad to get away, for the Dashwoods, not knowing what had passed, still sought her eagerly out; and although Philip had left London, there was great awkwardness in the acquaintance. She hoped after a break that all might become peaceable again, for she was sorry, as many are, to lose a friend in a lover.

Dorothy, when she pressed for Rosamond's coming, had asked for her help ; but when Rosamond arrived, and had seen all she had done, she felt that little more of her help was needed. There are people whose intellects seem to lie, neither in the brain, nor yet in the heart ; that is, they are devoid of originality, and devoid of fancy and passion ; and yet they have a good working intellect, nevertheless. Such was Dorothy's. She could not think a thought by herself, but she could carry out the ideas of others with a kind of plodding, earnest patience which was not only effective, but remarkable in its way.

Her little home had now been for two months actually a living thing. Nothing could be more homely, nothing more humble than its beginning ; but there it was, living and working, and doing its appointed duty.

Not by her own researches, but by her

indefatigable questioning of others, with larger power of research, she had, early in February, heard of a widow and her daughter—the widow of a tradesman, with £100 a year—whose happiness would be complete if allowed to cast in their lot, themselves, their time, and their substance, into Dorothy's home. The widow was an experienced nurse, as well as housekeeper; the daughter a good teacher, as well as cook and work-woman. Both were persons of enthusiasm, as well as of earnest religious feeling; and, which is not always the case, persons of good common sense also. They came and took possession; and the other arrangements were quickly made. Two orphan sisters, who had been for a year in the workhouse, strong girls of fourteen or fifteen, were boarded out by the guardians, to be brought up and instructed in household duties; and two old men, who had parish relief, but were not past work, thankfully undertook

the looking after the cow, and the pig, and the poultry. Six little boys—three with curable hurts, and three incurable cripples, who came but to have a smooth passage to a happier rest, were too easily found; and early in April the work began.

Rosamond gazed in astonishment. It was utterly unlike her vision—as unlike as a glorious sunset when transferred to a young lady's drawing-book is to the reality. But it pleased her as much, and in some respects more than her vision. Although she had always talked of keeping things plain and simple, she could now see how, in her smallest ideas, there was an ambition which, even had she had the power to begin to work it out, might have been fatal to it. All good things do best when following the plan of man's growth and the earth's formation; all private good things, that is to say—with nations, or large schemes, it may be otherwise.



This humble attempt realized in its small beginning all her wishes. It was the home of the widow ; it received the two orphans ; it was the peaceful abode of the afflicted children ; and over all, and in every arrangement, there was the hallowing influence of holy thoughts.

One or two suggestions, with regard to taste and beauty, were all that Rosamond had to offer. She wished for more flowers to be allowed in the small garden, and divers little cheerful and costless additions to be made in the house.

“Colour pleases children,” she said, “and I think it raises and refines people—do not you?—to see pretty things.”

“Yes, I dare say it does. I had not thought, you know. In fact, Rosamond, I am afraid I do not know how to think.”

“And then those cottons, Dorothy! I could not help wishing they were not so very ugly. Must the girls have such very ugly frocks?”

"It was for the washing," Dorothy said, staring a little. "They are so very good for washing."

"Of course that is the first thing to think of, but I do think pretty cottons sometimes wash. Do you think me impertinent, Dorothy? I am rather a lover of pretty things, and I never yet could see that it was wrong."

"Impertinent! Oh! Rosamond, and I feel such a worm when I am with you."

"Now, Dorothy, you must not say that. If we are to come to compliments, I am the one to speak. And you must for once let me say that I think you wonderful. When I think of this house as I saw it in the Winter," and she paused, and turned back, and they stood looking at it, "and think of what it is now, I can only call you wonderful."

"No, Rosamond, only very lucky, if one may say lucky to that sort of thing."

"Luck—if, as you say, one may say luck—that sort of luck only comes to those who

work for it. You would not have heard of Mrs. Croft unless you had worked hard to hear of her."

"Certainly finding her was wonderful. That did it at once."

"Yes, but it requires pains to hear of things, and you have brought in everything—you have done all I ever wished or thought of. I do think, Dorothy, you may, you must feel very happy."

"You are so kind, Rosamond! Well, yes, I should feel happy if it was not for two things. One is, I feel so ashamed, you know, at having been allowed to do it. You understand?"

"Yes," Rosamond nodded.

"And then because of—Oliver," she said; Oliver's name after a pause, in an awed and mysterious way.

"Why because of Oliver? I do not understand that," Rosamond asked, with great interest.

“Oh! Rosamond, because you know he is angry—that is to say, I ought not, perhaps, to say angry, but so hurt with me, and so disappointed.”

“Do you mean about this?”

“Yes, this very thing. I will tell you—it makes me very sorry. Do you remember what you wrote to him?”

“Not exactly.”

“Well, I suppose you said something about this. I had never dared to tell him, because you know I told you he was angry about our coming here. So he wrote then to ask what you meant. And then I told him; and I had just then heard of Mrs. Croft, so I said I thought it really was going to begin. And then he wrote me such a letter. I got it more than a month ago. It was written just before Mr. Hope was so ill.”

“He did not object to the thing, did he?”

“I am sure I do not know what he meant,” Dorothy said, pathetically. “No, I do not think it was that. It seemed to be that *I* should do it. I cannot remember all he said, but I know some of the words were that I had given him the last blow that could be given. What could he mean by that?” She looked up anxiously at Rosamond, to see if she could throw any light upon it.

“I think, perhaps, I guess, Dorothy. I think perhaps Oliver had wished to do it himself;” she said perhaps, but she knew and felt how it was.

“Oliver!” cried Dorothy; and Mr. Beaumont, though an adept in the art, might have envied his daughter the expression of round wonder which she brought into her eyes.

“I think it may be that.”

“But Oliver—how could he ever come to think of such a thing!”

It was a year and a half since Dorothy had seen her brother, and he was more of a boy to her than he had somehow come to be to Rosamond.

“Looking back, I remember things he said which make me fancy this. I think once at Glenowen you told him about my plan, and he was very kind in talking to me about it.”

“Ah!” Dorothy cried, with a new light breaking in. “Yes, perhaps ; and you know he had this secret in his head, which made it not quite talk. He admired so all you did, that I daresay he did think he would do this to please you.”

“I fancy so,” Rosamond said, turning her head from Dorothy for a moment.

But Dorothy, even if she had seen the faint blush that passed, would never have imagined that Oliver could have lifted his eyes to Rosamond. She would quite as soon have thought of marrying her herself. She was, however, occupied in thinking deeply

now, and her thoughts took up all her powers; after a moment she said,

“But then after all, Rosamond, I do not think Oliver ought to mind so much. So as the thing is done, it does not matter who does it—does it?”

“Not to you, Dorothy. But I am afraid it does to some.”

“Oliver is so unselfish. I should never think it would to him.”

“I think I can understand Oliver,” Rosamond said gravely; “in fact, I know I can; for I confess, Dorothy, when I first got your letter, I felt just as he does. I felt as if I had had the last blow that could be given.”

She smiled a little, but tremulously, as she repeated the words.

“Oh! Rosamond!” Dorothy cried, with a deep, unutterable groan.

“It is long past, Dorothy,” and though they stood in a high road she suddenly kissed her. “Do not be sorry or afraid. I am

only telling you to show you that I can feel for Oliver. I might have said formerly that I should not mind, but I know now that I did mind. You see I am not very perfect, but selfish and proud, and I am rather glad you should know it."

"Oh! Rosamond!" with another deep groan; and this time Rosamond laughed, and drew her away, and as they walked home, contrived to satisfy her mind as to her present feelings on the subject.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

**I**T was not intended that this should be a love-story. It was the story of the incidents attending the settlement of an eccentric will, with the conduct of the persons interested in it; and, having brought the settlement to a conclusion, whether satisfactory or not, the story has come to an end.

One only further incident has to be mentioned, and that, though both commonplace and novelish—commonplace because novelish—is yet so natural that it is impossible to come to any other conclusion. And that

is the union of the two persons interested in the eccentric will.

When some one remonstrated with Mr. Thackeray on the marriage, in his novel of "Esmond," of Esmond with Lady Castlewood, asking, "Why did you do it?" he replied, "I!—I had nothing to do with it. They did it themselves!" And his account was probably true. In following the course of a story there are certain things that must be, and it is vain to struggle against them.

But, if a due consideration is given, there is in fact nothing that is not natural in a change in Rosamond's feelings towards Oliver Beaumont; in the gradual rising from the liking of the boy, to the interest in, the esteem of, and finally the love of the man. For thus it was that the change was effected.

After her visit to Nettlethorpe and to London she returned home; and, in the quiet of home, the thought of Oliver pursued her. All she had heard, all she imagined,

all she pictured—*thought* about him, in short, interest in him, pursued her and occupied her. There was rarely a day that she did not think about him, and speculate a little upon his feelings. This went on for a time without any further development; but as months flowed on there gradually arose a wish—at last a longing to see him again. It was not love; it was only a mental dreaming; but it was a gradual change in the state of the mind and fancy towards him.

Meanwhile, he did not return. When her son seemed to have recovered, Mrs. Hope returned to England, and the travelling was resumed. But there was a great change in the travelling. It was no longer the travelling of adventure in which Oliver had delighted, it was the travelling about of an invalid. Wet and damp, night air and noon-day air, sun and cold, had to be guarded against, and Oliver had to assume an authority, and to take on himself

a responsibility which, though useful to his character, was foreign to it—was indeed a constant source of disappointment and self-sacrifice.

The following Winter was passed in Egypt, and the young man's health seemed to improve, but in the following Summer it began to give way. Mrs. Hope again joined her son, and for six months she and Oliver together watched over a fading life.

In the course of those last months Frank Vaughan went to travel, as something of a travelling tutor, with two or three young men, and they, in the course of their travels, made Oliver's place of abode their resting-place. He wrote from thence to Rosamond a touching account of Oliver's devotion to the poor boy, giving many particulars and traits of character which fastened upon her mind.

It was thus that when at last he returned it was no longer the boy Oliver that she

expected, or was prepared or longed to see, but a young man in whom, from many circumstances, her deepest interest had been excited.

It was in February that Wilfred Hope died. Three weeks afterwards, Oliver was settled at Nettlethorpe. An aching longing for the sight of his mother's face, and for the very name of home, together perhaps with a contact with those ills of mortal life which subdue the childish whims and passions of man, had caused him to revoke the resolution he had so hastily made. Once he had said that he never would set his foot on the ground which he held to be Rosamond's. Time had not softened his feeling on the subject, but time had taught him to forgive his father for the step he had taken—the Oliver, in fact, who returned, was no longer a boy.

When Rosamond heard that he was arrived, her feelings regarding him under-

went some change—the longing to see him once more gave way to some degree of agitation, doubt, and dread. She did not know whether they were to meet, or how they were to meet, if they did meet. Whether, as he had said, their paths were separate, or whether they would be friends once more? She did not know how he now thought of her. Neither from Frank, nor from Dorothy, nor from Mrs. Fraser, had she ever gathered whether or not she was in his mind, or effaced from it. Not that up to this moment she had considered the point. She had perhaps, without considering, assumed that his feeling was unchanged; but now, when a meeting was possible, the thought of how they would meet arose, and the recurrence of the thought agitated her.

She was not long left to speculation. Wilfred Hope died at the end of February; in the middle of March, Oliver travelled home with the sorrowing mother,

and early in April he and Rosamond met.

It was a bright evening, towards five o'clock. Rosamond and Laura were in the drawing-room at Glenowen. Rosamond had a cold, and was working; Laura was in her hat, and after giving an account of some patients she had been to see, was about to return, to enjoy the evening air, when the door opened suddenly, and Frank came in. There was a rising and an embracing, and a slight exclamation from both sisters; but Frank was one who went and came at his pleasure, and his appearances were no subjects of astonishment. When Rosamond turned from him, her eyes, and, in the same instant, Laura's, turned to the doorway, and there stood a changed, but still recognizable form.

"Oliver!" both exclaimed; and he came forward.

In the single instant that elapsed between the recognition and the exclamation, the

bright light of the low sun streaming into the room had fallen on Rosamond's face, and had shown a change, a glow, a touch of something which, whether it was merely surprise, or whether it was pleasure or displeasure, Oliver saw, but could not exactly read and understand.

"Frank asked me, and I came," was all he said. He shook hands with Rosamond, and then, turning to Laura, said, "This, I suppose, is Laura ; but if it is Laura, I suppose I must not call her Laura any more."

"I am sure you need not speak," Laura said, for *she* felt no spark of agitation or speculation in this meeting ; "never in my whole life," speaking with that large experience common to the young, "have I seen anybody as changed as you are !"

She was justified in what she said. If he had not grown actually taller, his figure, set and strongly built, had assumed a height which, even in his tall boyhood, had not seem-



ed likely. His complexion was bronzed, and a beard which, whatever might be his future intentions, was still ornamenting his face, gave a look of maturity to his whole appearance ; and beyond this, the expression of his countenance was changed. It was open as ever, but it was marked with lines of thought and feeling.

“Do you mean I am really altered?” he said, in answer to Laura.

“There can be no doubt about it. Can there, Rosamond?” she cried. “Is not Oliver changed.”

Rosamond raised her eyes.

“Yes,” she said—“certainly changed.”

“Yet I am not much changed,” he said ; and his gaze rested on her for a single instant with an expression that strangely agitated her.

She turned her eyes away, and Frank spoke quickly and merrily.

“Can we stay, Rosamond? You have

not asked our plans; you have neither of you said a word as to pressing us to make ourselves comfortable."

"It was Frank who made me thus take you by storm. Shall I stay?—can you have us both?" Oliver said.

"We like being taken by storm. You must not think," Rosamond said, smiling to Oliver, as she got up and passed him, "that there is any difficulty. I must go and make a few arrangements; but I shall soon be back," and she left the room.

"Shall we go out?" Laura said.

"I was going to ask if I might," replied Oliver. "I want to see the old gardens."

"Oh! the poor old gardens! They are not what they used to be. Nobody works now as they used to do. Frank is never here, and papa gets more and more busy."

She led the way, however, and they stood around the gardens talking, till suddenly Oliver said,

“I see Miss Vaughan has gone back to the drawing-room. I must go and speak to her.” And he ran off.

Laura looked up at Frank with a wondering look.

“If you remember all that happened about Oliver and Rosamond,” he replied sedately to her glance, “you will not wonder that he has some remarks to make.”

Oliver walked suddenly into the drawing-room, and said,

“Can I speak to you for a few minutes, Miss Vaughan?”

“Oh! yes, certainly,” she said; yet, not at all certain what he was going to say, with more hurry than was common to her manner.

“I met Frank in London yesterday. Ever since I came home I had been thinking—I will not say I had been thinking about you, as that might give the impression that I had once ceased to think; but I had

been thinking whether or not I should try to see you—whether or not I could bear it. When Frank asked me to come down with him, I said yes without thought; and, though almost all the way I repented of what I was doing, I still came on.”

“I am glad you came,” Rosamond said, anxious to speak quietly, but not quite succeeding. “I have wished to see you. It is very long since we saw you, and things have happened.”

“Yes, it is long—the time has been long, and there have, indeed, been strange things. You must not think, Miss Vaughan”—and here he sat down and placed his arms on the table opposite to her, leaning forward and speaking earnestly—“that I want to go over all these things—I cannot, and I dare not do it. At one time they almost made me mad, and if my mind dwelt upon them, I might be mad still. You know, I daresay, how I said I would come home no more; I

felt as if the touch of that land would burn my feet. But now for many months past I have lived in the presence of death, and that has changed me. I do not know that it has improved me, but it has changed me. One cannot be full of one's earthly passions when one sits night after night by a dying bed. I hardly know whether I am right or wrong in forgetting all my resolutions, almost my vows; but I know that I have put them aside, and have submitted myself to my father's will."

"Surely you were right?" she said gently.

"I do not know; I have done it, and I cannot think."

He was silent for a few moments. Rosamond had had her work in her hand when he came in, and she now looked down upon it, though without touching it; yet she could feel his eyes upon her, as if they would read her through and through.

"On these things, then, Miss Vaughan,

you understand I do not mean to speak ; there were other resolutions I made—and those, too, I mean to forget. I came down here when Frank asked me without deciding what I should say ; but now when I see you, and when I sit again in this room, I feel it cannot be wrong to say to you what I once did. Do you remember when I sat in that window, and you came in to me ?”

Rosamond moved her head in acquiescence, looking up at him for half a second.

“I cannot remember how I said it, but I know what I said ; I told you that myself and all I had, or all I ever could have, were laid at your feet, for you to do with what you would. And that is what I wish to repeat to you now, only that now——what was then on my lips and in my fancy is now like the blood of my life. I do not want to say more now ; I do not want you to speak—I do not expect you to speak. I would almost rather you did not speak. I only

feel that it cannot be wrong to let you know that time has not, and, now that I see you again, I feel never can, never could, change me."

He got up abruptly.

"But, Oliver," Rosamond said, "I would rather speak."

"Oh, not to say never! Let me be here, and not hopeless, this one night."

"But, Oliver, I would rather speak, because,"—here Rosamond suddenly looked up, and looked full at him, with such a blush on her face as poor Philip Dashwood had pined to see—"because I think, I suppose, I am in some way changed. I hardly know what to say or how to say it, for in a degree it is like a new acquaintance."

"Oh! no, it is not—quite the same—the very same!"

"I do not know much—I cannot say much, but I only know this now, feel this now, that, if you had forgotten me, I might

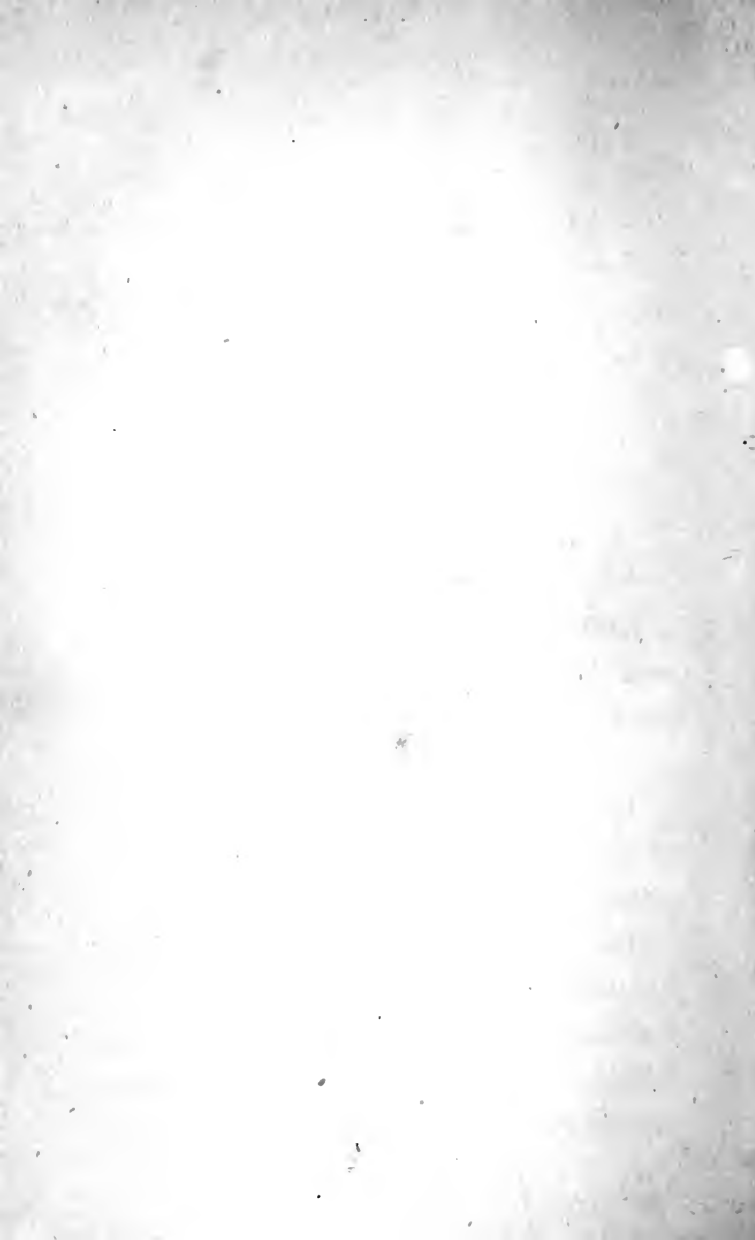
have been"—there was a pause, and then a tremulous—"miserable."

"Oh ! Miss Vaughan, is it possible?"

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L O R D   L A T I M E R.



# LORD LATIMER.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**A** MABEL, Amabel, where are you hiding yourself?”

This question was asked in a voice quick and sharp—sharp, not angry—authoritative, not irritated.

“I am here, mamma. Do you want me?”

The answer was given in a voice singularly soft and clear; one of those voices whose very tones soothe and prepossess.

The owner of the first voice was Mrs. Lee. She was a busy, bustling woman; a woman born to keep a house, and provide for the temporal wants of a family. She was unusually busy this morning, and, as was her

custom when unusually busy, looked well, and appeared altogether in a state of animation. She had on a substantial brown silk gown, completely covered by a brown holland apron, and the dress set off her fresh complexion, her well-formed figure, and well-covered bones.

As she made the call for her daughter, she hastily opened the door, and the answer came from within. The room into which she entered was an unused drawing-room ; it was bright and fresh and orderly, but without much appearance of comfort.

Her daughter had risen from a kneeling posture beside a tall bookcase. She was standing when her mother entered the room, with a book (it was Miss Burney's "Evelina") in her hand, her finger thrust between the leaves, and a slight blush on her cheek.

This young girl, Amabel Lee, was a beauty, and a beauty of the first order, for she had the graceful figure and regular features of

seventeen, with a smoothness and freshness and roundness seldom seen except in early childhood. This combination with its contrasts made her peculiar charm. Her colouring and her innocente expression were childish; but the dreamy look of her large blue eyes was not the look of a child; so too the softness and roundness of her figure were childish, but her movements were unlike the movements of a child.

Her mother surveyed her for a moment as she stood blushing before her, and then said in the same sharp yet not angry key :

“ Well, Amabel, what are you doing here ? ”

“ I was reading, mamma. Dorothy asked me to dust the books while she was busy ; but really, mamma, they are quite clean ; I could not find a speck of dust, and so—then I just took out this book to read.”

There had been a little hesitation about

showing the book ; but a truthful nature prevailed, and she presented it.

“Novels and trash ! Really, Amabel, I am ashamed of you. It is bad enough at any time ; but to-day, when we are all working like slaves, I must say I think it hard I can get no help from my own daughter.”

“Oh ! mamma, don’t say that. I should be glad to help. But what can I do ?”

“Anybody can do what they will. When Sophia was at home she saved me half my work. She gave out the linen, and helped Dorothy with the cakes, and Priscilla with the pastry ; and once, and she was but fifteen, I had a bad headache, and she told me to lie down and trust to her, and she sent up the best dinner and the prettiest dessert ever seen in this house.”

“I know, mamma. I know very well how useless I am. I am sure I wish I was like Sophia. I would help if I could, indeed I would ; but I don’t know how it is, my

fingers won't do anything well," and she looked with mingled compassion and displeasure on her pretty white hands.

"Now, Amabel, that provokes me more than anything. It is the fault of the day. People lay the blame of their follies on anything or anyone but themselves. One man can't plough because his genius doesn't allow him, and another can't study because his dreams prevent him. It is nothing but wilfulness and opposition to Providence. Do you mean to say that God has given you hands, but no power to move them?"

"No, mamma, I didn't mean to say that—I daresay I spoke foolishly—I will try more—indeed I will! Is there anything to-day I can try to do?"

"A great deal," her mother replied, softened by her humility. "Let me see; what o'clock is it?—half-past three. Dorothy will just be making the cakes; go down directly and help her. Don't say you can't,

but say you will. Take a willing mind with you, and that goes further than hands; and when you have done all you can do downstairs, come back to me. I've got some linen I want you to mend."

As she ceased speaking, she bustled away, the jingle of her keys as she went giving her the privilege of the lady at Banbury Cross—"She shall have music wherever she goes."

Amabel raised her hand, to return "Evelina" to its place in the bookshelf; but after a few moments' thought, withdrew it again, and carried it with her to the still-room—not with the slightest wish or idea of disobeying her mother, but simply in the hope of some leisure moment, when she might discover how soon Evelina and Lord Orville met again. She was a reader of old novels—the few that she found in the bookcase—and liked them better than the stories of the day.



"I am come to help you, Dorothy," she said, in her gentle voice, as she entered the still-room. "Will you tell me what I can do?"

Dorothy was a quick, sensible-looking countrywoman of past thirty, who, having watched Amabel from childhood, treated her with more love than respect. At Amabel's question, "What can I do?" Dorothy privately winked her eye, and twisted her mouth into a humorous expression of wonder, but pausing for a moment in her labours, she inquired, "Why, what *can* you do, Miss Amabel?"

"I don't know, Dorothy—I am afraid not much."

"I am afraid not either," Dorothy replied emphatically, as she began to stir a mixture in a basin with furious violence.

"I wonder why it is, Dorothy," the young girl continued, in a confidential tone; "I am sure I wish to be useful. I wish I was Sophia—but——"

“You wish you was Miss Lee—Mrs. Shafto that is!” Dorothy exclaimed, in indignant wonder.

“I do, indeed, Dorothy. I am sure I wish I was useful. But I don’t know how it is, I can’t do anything right—my fingers won’t work; that is,” remembering her mother’s reprimand; “they feel as if they won’t. Can you tell me why it is?”

“Yes, I can, Miss Amabel, my dear—it is because you wasn’t born to work—that’s my opinion. You was born to be a great lady, and so I have said a thousand times; you wasn’t born to soil them pretty fingers of yours with the dirty works of the world; and that’s my opinion.” And at each expression of her opinion, Dorothy cracked an egg into the large white basin before her.

“I don’t think mamma would like you to say that, Dorothy, because she says we ought all to try to be useful; and she says hands can work, if they will. Can I help

you, Dorothy? I should like to try."

"Why, yes, Miss Amabel, you shall stir this for me, after a bit, while I butter the moulds, and get the things to rights. But wait now, my dear, and let me tie this apron round you, for it makes such a sputter; and put your hair away; and turn up your sleeves—there, now, you look like a cook, Miss Amabel, in good earnest." And Dorothy privately winked again, and returned to her labours.

Amabel, meanwhile, took her seat on the corner of the dresser, and indulged herself, while she waited Dorothy's pleasure, with a glance at "Evelina." Lest her helplessness should be judged too severely, it must be stated that, in a great degree, it was the fault of circumstances. She was a younger sister, and till within the last six months had had no call upon her fingers, and but little upon her intellect. Mrs. Lee was too prudent to spoil any of her children, but Amabel, a

docile, gentle child, who gave no trouble, had been petted by her father, loved by her brothers, and suffered by her mother to grow up, as wild-flowers grow, without care or molestation. This was while the eldest daughter remained at home.

Sophy Lee was, like her mother, a born housekeeper. She was a genius—a genius in household economy, not in intellectual endowment ; but, with an extraordinary development of the organ of domination—if there be one—she began to rule the house before she was twelve years old ; and her mother could say with truth that, excellent as was her own system of management, Sophia, before she was sixteen, cast all her virtues into the shade. Such being the case, there was no need of Amabel's interference in the family arrangements—nay, rather, Sophia would never have permitted her pretty little simpleton of a sister to have a voice in the house. But at nineteen Sophia married, and

though Mrs. Lee did not altogether regret the change which brought *her* forward again, she began to see and to regret the helplessness of her younger daughter.

For six months, therefore, Amabel had been continually called upon for assistance which she could not render. Her head grew dizzy over the household accounts—for even the rudiments of arithmetic she very imperfectly knew ; she cried for a whole day over a wristband of her father's shirt—not from indolence or dislike, but because her fingers could not guide her stitches aright ; and, by the side of Sophia's beautiful work, her uneven attempts looked insane indeed. Her talents in the kitchen and in the still-room had as yet been little tried, but this day was a busy day and all hands were wanted. There was a great cattle-show and agricultural meeting at a neighbouring town ; and Mr. Lee had hospitably offered to entertain a number of strangers in his house. As

some of the guests were of a rank superior to his, Mrs. Lee, although in most respects a sensible woman, could not divest herself of the wish to make a grand appearance. Mr. Lee, it may here be said, was a gentleman of small independent property, whose means were increased by farming, on a tolerably large, and a very successful scale.

We left Amabel on the dresser. It needed but a moment for "Evelina" to engage her whole attention, and her head, with her long auburn curls twisted behind her ears, was bent over her book in absorbed enjoyment, when she was startled by footsteps in the passage outside, and an exclamation, "My gracious! who comes here?" from Dorothy.

The door of the still-room opened, and two gentlemen appeared. The first was a good-looking man, well though largely built, of about fifty. This was Mr. Lee. His countenance was neither intellectual nor ani-

mated, but there was a charm about it—the charm of truth and good sense and kindness. The other person was very different. He was much younger, his figure was lighter and taller, his features were finely formed, and in his whole appearance there was a refined and high-bred air which was wanting in Mr. Lee; but, with all these advantages, he was a much less attractive-looking personage. There was nothing about him that was absolutely repelling; his countenance was neither stern nor malignant, nor sarcastic nor unprincipled; but in both air and countenance there was a lifeless gravity, which involuntarily depressed those who looked at him.

This was Lord Latimer. Who Lord Latimer was shall be explained, and at some length, in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

HERBERT LATIMER was a spoilt child. Spoiling is of two kind. The spoiling of true affection rarely ruins the character. Love is an emanation of divinity—the truest, purest, best emblem of God on earth ; it will therefore guard as its most precious treasure all that is true and pure in the object of its care, all that remains in the image of God. It may weaken the powers, it may prepare for the young pilgrim, whom it should forward on the road to Heaven, unusual trials and temptations ; it may render him less fit to buffet with the winds of this rude world—but even in over-cherishing,



it guards the beauty of the flower. It is different with the spoiling which proceeds from inferior principles. The love which shows itself in a weak favouritism is not love, but selfishness ; so, also, is that kind of partial tenderness which is founded on pride and vanity ; pride in a son and heir—pride in some graces of the body, or gifts of the intellect. The springs of this kind of affection are tainted, and its fruits are tainted likewise.

It was to this latter kind of spoiling that Herbert Latimer was exposed. His mother was a weak woman ; shallow in intellect and shallow in feeling. Love in her nature was not a strong passion ; but by means of gathering up its flying particles into one focus, she managed to bestow an affection of a very determined kind upon her son. She loved her only son because he was her only son—one son among four daughters. There was nothing very reprehensible or uncom-

mon in this; most mothers love their only sons with some peculiar feeling of tenderness; but that her fondness sprang from a selfish source, might be gathered from its effects; for the love that was given to him was stolen from others—from her husband, and from her daughters, and was employed to ruin his character and strengthen his faults.

His father's love was of a kind still inferior to his mother's; its source was more tainted, its selfishness more strongly developed. His character was not incapable of strong feeling, for it had strength of certain kinds; but the principle of love had died away for want of nurture. He was proud and ambitious, and on a low scale, without those lofty aspirations which sometimes redeem pride and ambition from an ill name. He was wrapt in petty interests and cares of selfish grandeur; and, in pursuing his own objects, was totally indifferent to the thoughts,

wishes, or feelings of those about him. His care for his son was simply founded on the fact that he was the sole heir of his honours, the sole branch of the family tree. While others, therefore, when they stood in his path, were of no account, but swept before him as mercilessly as the leaves of Autumn before the blast, this only son was as the path itself, and was cared for accordingly. Over all others who approached him, Lord Latimer reigned supreme. But he was ruled by the will of a child.

The principle of self-interest is strong in human nature, and, where other principles are not taught, rules and guides. Self-interest prompted the servants of the house to follow their master's example. They did not love Herbert, but they bowed to him. It was the same with his sisters; two were older than Herbert, two were younger; the elder saw there was no hope, and submitted to be his slaves; the younger dared not re-

sist. A few strifes had divided the house before the lesson of Herbert's dominion had been learnt; but father, mother, nurse, servants, masters, rallied round Herbert's standard, and his victory was won.

Such was the conspiracy to ruin an immortal soul, and though its effects were not those that commonly follow, it was fatal. Herbert grew up with but one thought in his head—himself. He was clothed in himself; the air he breathed was himself; himself was behind him—himself was before him; his will was rule and law; his judgment was the world's guide; the moral law, even the divine commandments, seemed from his submission to receive honour and sanction. Not that he argued thus—he had no feeling of his own supremacy; a feeling would have given some hope of its destruction; it was only that “he had a strange infirmity in his eyes, that wherever they turned he encountered the visible moving

image of himself." Sun and stars were sun and stars, not in themselves, but because he saw them.

The effects were not those that commonly follow, because, as far as outward appearances went, they were contrary to what might have been foretold. Herbert was no violent, capricious tyrant—he was a despot; but he was a just one. He ruled his sisters with a rod of iron; but even as a child his rule had no harshness, no intemperance, no childish freakishness in it.

"Cecilia, give me that book," he one day said to a sister a year younger than himself. It was Herbert's book, but Cecilia was interested in it. She refused to give it up. He went a few steps towards her, and repeated his request firmly, but civilly. She looked frightened; but the story was interesting, and, holding it firmly, she retreated before him. No scuffle ensued. He could have pursued, and taken it from her

in a moment ; but a boy should never hurt a girl—this had long been his calm and sober decision. He took other means. “You must do as you please, Cecilia ; but if you have my book, I shall have your bird.”

And without another remonstrance he proceeded to Cecilia’s room, took down the cage, carried it to his own room, and locked the door.

Cecilia’s bird was Cecilia’s heart—she was vanquished.

“Here, Herbert, take the book, and give me the bird.”

“No,” he quietly replied—“you have your choice, I shall have mine.”

Cecilia wept and prayed, but all in vain. She complained to her mother, but her mother said Herbert was right ; she complained to her nurse, but her nurse said, “Mr. Herbert must do as he thinks best.” In a passion of crying she was carried to

bed, the only words audible that the bird would be starved. But Herbert was firm. Cecilia had rebelled—it was just and right that she should suffer for it. Yet he blended mercy with his justice. His inward determination had been that Cecilia should be punished for the day ; and with the day his displeasure was at an end. One of the faithful vassals of his will was desired, on pain of his serious anger, to call him at the dawn of the next day. At half-past three the housemaid stood at his bedside. Herbert rose without a word, carried the cage, and placed it on a chair by Cecilia's bedside, kissed her, sleeping, in token of full forgiveness, and with a tranquil conscience returned to bed.

“ Oh ! Herbert, how kind you were ! ” Cecilia said, when she met him.

“ No, Cecilia,” he replied ; “ only just. I never meant to punish for more than the day.”

“Here is your book—I am very sorry—do take it now.”

“No, Cecilia, keep the book. I don’t want to quarrel about such a thing. All I ask is to be obeyed.”

“You shall be obeyed,” she said; and she kept her word.

This childish scene exhibited many features of Herbert’s character—his control of his own passions; his rigid sense of justice; his desire to do his duty; even in a certain sense the generosity of nature which scorned to profit by victory. But it showed also in glaring colours the defect which brings all good things to nought. Charity covers a multitude of sins, and overcovers a multitude of faults; the want of it clouds and darkens a multitude of virtues. The want of charity is the presence of self. Charity and self may grow together; and, indeed, do so in almost all men. But it is a strife, and the more the



nature refines and improves, the harder the strife to crush the one, and raise the other, until the victory of charity is complete. But with Herbert there was no strife, for there was no consciousness of ill. He had been taught to consider himself the centre of all things; and the lesson had been learnt as few good lessons are learnt. Sown at first as small as mustard-seed, it had grown up till all his virtues lodged in its branches.

Herbert was eleven years old when the quarrel just recorded took place. Brought up as he was, age was not likely to improve him. He increased in stature, and increased in knowledge, but the natural virtues of his character did not increase in proportion—they did not die, but they hardened as they were. The sap which gives all things life and spring, was wanting to make them grow. At eighteen he went to college, and there, if he distinguished himself by any remark-

able characteristic, it was only by his silence and quietness.

He had no distant ambitious hope to kindle his genius and animate his studies. He learned with due diligence that which it was becoming in Herbert Latimer to learn, and he was satisfied. From the path of moral duty in which Herbert Latimer should walk, no pleasure, no amusement, no temptation could draw him astray; but few admired the virtue which had no life in it. His friends and acquaintance were limited in number. The "leanings and leaps of the heart," that quick sense of truth and sympathy, which lays the foundation of so many after-friendships, as valuable as they are lasting, were not in him. He felt no want; was as still as a stagnant pool. A few with whom circumstances had occasionally thrown him in earlier days had followed him to college, or preceded him there, and for these he felt regard. Per-

haps, although he knew it not, the light of the days when even in his heart more genuine feelings had been alive, shed a radiance round them, and unconsciously attracted him towards its warmth. Be that as it may, with these few he associated, and with no others. Even among the heads and authorities, he was remarked only as a grave and sober young man, regular in his habits, attentive to his studies, and civil in his deportment ; no fault to be found with him, but with no quality to admire.

When he left college, his mother was in declining health, and he returned to live at home. The few years that followed probably saved his character from utter petrification, the good properties of earlier days being again called into action. The sight of sickness and weakness is in itself softening ; and, though Lady Latimer's character could not excite any ardent feeling, still Herbert loved his mother, and felt her loss.

But a benefit even greater than this was the situation in which he found himself after her death—namely, the protector of his sisters.

Their father had never loved them, never cared for their pleasure or amusement. While their mother lived, they had shared in certain luxuries of life, which long habit had made almost necessities to them; but with her life they ceased. Their father did not use them ill, but he took no heed to the wants and wishes of youth; to such things as an allowance sufficient to dress with propriety and comfort, the use of a carriage, new books, new music, and that degree of change both in place and society which is beneficial to the body and to the mind; and while these natural desires were unstudied, the very glance of his son's eye was watched, that his lightest wishes might be foreseen.

The neglect of his sisters' comfort was

long unperceived by Herbert, for his eye was slow to discern the feelings of others. The discovery was made, owing to the fastidiousness of his taste. His eye was not only correct, requiring neatness and order, but it had a very keen sense of beauty. He did not study dress—he knew nothing about it ; but he was offended by an ill-dressed woman. Nine or ten months after their mother's death his sisters' mourning had become shabby and rusty. Herbert remained long silent, for he was not fond of interference, but at length he spoke to his sister Cecilia on the subject. She coloured deeply, but at length replied that they had no money. He looked surprised, and made a few inquiries ; and though Cecilia said but little, and made no complaint, she said enough to rouse his sense of justice. He watched and saw that they were neglected, and from that time constituted himself their protector. To them he was of great ser-

vice, but the service they rendered to him, in turning his eyes, though but at short intervals, from himself, was greater.

At five-and-twenty his father died. Two years afterwards all his sisters were married, and he remained alone at Audricourt. Such as he had been in youth, such was he now—regular in his habits, and attentive to his duties. A just landlord, a just master, a just and civil neighbour. But no warmth of life, no light of charity, was to be found in him.

There was no affectation of misanthropy in his habits and tastes. There was no affectation of anything. He lived in himself and to himself, because he himself was all in all to himself; but he was not conscious of it. He never moralized, “Here I will live by myself and cherish myself, and enjoy my own charms, and hate the world.” He knew nothing of his tastes. He lived as simply and unconsciously for himself alone, as the

loving and unselfish live for all about them.

From five and twenty to three and thirty he lived at Audricourt, comparatively speaking in solitude and with little change. A few visits his sisters paid him ; a few visits he paid to them ; but though they were grateful to him, and in absence thought of him with affection, they were as they had always been, afraid of him, and there was no cordiality or warmth in their intercourse. They pressed him to come to them, but when he entered the house a cloud or mist seemed to enter with him. Spontaneous thought and emotion seemed at an end ; not for one instant could it be forgotten that Lord Latimer was there. He stood among young and old, not unkind, not stern, but a pale grave statue, and from his influence some magic air seemed to be diffused, which changed all about him into machines. It was no wonder that even those who loved

him saw his departure with a sigh of relief. A few other acquaintances he had, with whom occasionally he mingled; and duly every year he took his place for a few days in the House of Lords; performing that and other duties which he judged to be incumbent on his station; but he had no pleasure in these duties; he returned to his seclusion to live with himself, to do all that he himself ought to do, and was content.

But at thirty-three a change came. It was that change which sooner or later comes to all mankind; whose date is never earlier than thirty, and rarely later than forty. The eyes which have been steadfastly looking forward suddenly close; there is no more to attract; the feet which have been pressing up the hill pause, for a summit (not the summit long seen in the eye of fancy) is attained. Hope, which so long has been an accompaniment of the way, suddenly departs. Light fades from the landscape,



mist from the distance ; suddenly all is calm, bare, and cold. It is the departure of youth.

Now Lord Latimer had known as little youth as it is possible to know ; he had had as few hopes as man can have. But when a character is described, it must be by comparison. Lord Latimer was a dry specimen of humanity ; but he was perfectly human, and all that youthfulness and hope which youth, however unconsciously, must have, he had had. He knew nothing about it ; he never followed the play of his imagination, never interested himself to trace the forms of the golden shadows it cast about his head ; but, however unconsciously, his imagination did play. Like the rest of mankind, however little noticed they might be, he had his waking and his sleeping dreams. All these at thirty-three suddenly ceased, and though he had felt no conscious pleasure in the light of youth and hope which had

brightened his path, he missed it when it disappeared.

So long as hope is with us, we do not, however lonely our circumstances may be, feel alone. There is a something in the distance, however faint and undefined, which is companionship. But when youth departs and middle life begins, that kind of hope which builds in the far future is at an end. It may rise again in a steadier and serener form, even for earth ; it will certainly arise for the religiously-disposed in the unseen world, deepening and concentrating as the steps advance ; but there is in almost every mind a sudden time when youthful hope vanishes, and when the mind recoils from building in the uninviting regions of middle life and old age. Then comes the feeling of loneliness, the dread of the future ; a certain restlessness of mind which desires to make a provision of peaceful hours—a desire to build tangible objects in the future,

in place of the shadowy ones which have vanished. This is the time when men and women would do well to watch over themselves, lest, in the hope of escaping from a sudden dreariness, they plunge into folly or misery.

Something of this state of mind was that which seized on Lord Latimer. That stagnant lake, his heart, began to give certain signs of a restlessness it never had known before; he began to look round his lonely abode and wish for a shadow upon the wall—nothing but a shadow, nothing defined; a movement, a something besides himself.

At first he did not understand himself, he did not perceive to what this restlessness was tending; it burst upon him suddenly as he stood watching an effect of light on a landscape of Gainsborough. It was a homely scene; a cottage in a wood, a tired cottager lying at his door, and a young wife

bending over him with a tankard in her hand. On this bending figure a ray of sunset, shooting through the trees, fell brightly, and though there was no actual beauty in the face or figure, it spoke vividly of care, tenderness, or domestic love. Lord Latimer turned from the picture, walked thoughtfully across the room, and his decision was made. He would marry.

It was a decision easily made in the mind, but more difficult to act upon. Not because of the doubt whether any would be bold enough to become his wife—for of difficulty on that side of the question he naturally did not think—but there was difficulty in his own mind. He was tolerant towards the world in general, for with it he had nothing to do, but he was hard to please where he himself was concerned. An ugly woman offended his bodily eye; a pretty woman the eye of his mind—for he usually detected, or fancied he detected, a lurking

desire for admiration, and that was offensive to him. A clever woman usurped a superiority which, in his eyes, was unbecoming ; and a silly woman was intolerable. A silent woman was too severe a tax upon *his* powers, for he had little to communicate ; but a talkative woman was a positive nuisance. That youthful nature, which Dickens has called “a gushing thing,” revolted him ; yet he had no admiration for a dolt. In short, he wished for every grace of body and every charm of mind, with this addition—that *he* should be the heart of the whole, that the eye should move, and the tongue speak, and the thoughts spring up at his bidding, and his alone ; and this exquisite machine it might possibly be hard to find.

Meanwhile, the mere decision, the new thought, filled up that sudden void, and stilled the unaccustomed restlessness ; and again, in perfect contentment, he resided with

his own self at Audricourt. So two more years passed on, and he attained the age of thirty-five.

## CHAPTER III.

WE left, at the close of the first chapter, two gentlemen at the door of the still-room, and Amabel Lee on the dresser. Lord Latimer—who was one of those gentlemen—had his coat-sleeve torn, and his arm in a sling, and as he stood in the shadow, behind Mr. Lee, he looked so pale and suffering that Dorothy might well exclaim, “Whom have we here?”

Mr. Lee walked in.

“Why, Amabel, what are you doing?” he asked, in a surprised but pleasant voice, as his young daughter raised her startled eyes and crimson cheeks from her book.

“I came here,” she said, sliding off the

dresser, and casting down her eyes, with a foolish yet natural expression of shame at her singular toilette, "to try if I could help Dorothy. Mamma sent me."

Mr. Lee half smiled.

"Quite right, my dear child; and I wish I could hope that you had been really useful. But now you shall go upstairs, and see if Lord Latimer's room is ready." He paused, and with a movement of his head to Amabel, said, "My daughter, my lord."

Without raising her eyes from the ground, Amabel curtseyed low and gracefully. From the moment of his entrance, Lord Latimer had been regarding her—not with a stare, but with a fixed look of calm inquiry and scrutiny. He now bowed, but said not a word.

This introduction occupied only a moment. Mr. Lee then went nearer to his daughter, and said in a low voice,

"Lord Latimer has had a fall from his



horse; but he does not wish to have a fuss made about it. You need not say that I am come home. Dorothy does not want you at present. Run away, my child."

He laid his hand on her shoulder with a smile and a fond movement, and gently motioned her to be gone.

Lord Latimer held open the door for her to pass, and slightly bowed again in reply to the movement of her head, as with a kind of shy grace she thanked him, and glided by.

"Now, my lord, I will leave you," said Mr. Lee. "Dorothy is a skilful leech, and you may safely entrust yourself to her hands."

"My hurt is very slight," replied Lord Latimer. "I hope I shall not give much trouble."

Mr. Lee left the still-room.

Dorothy approached with a curtsy, and a "No trouble, my lord," and assisted him

in laying aside his coat and uncovering the wound. "It's a deepish scratch, my lord," she exclaimed, after inspecting it; not a bit abashed by the staid demeanour of her guest; "but when I have washed out the gravel that's somehow got in, and bound it up in a piece of wet lint, it won't give you much pain; and I don't think you will need to wear your arm in a sling."

"I shall be much obliged to you to attend to it," he replied, quickly. "I felt sure there was no sufficient cause to go in search of a surgeon."

"Not when I'm in the way, my lord. I'm as good a hand at a wound as any surgeon in the country."

She bustled about, and made her preparations: Lord Latimer standing still and tall as a poplar-tree in the middle of the still-room.

"Do I hurt your lordship?" she once asked, looking up with compassion, as, with

a skilful yet not particularly gentle hand, she washed out some rough sand from a deep and raw wound.

“I do not mind pain,” he replied, with the same quiet tone, and evidently spoke but the very truth; not a line of his face winced beneath her touch.

When she began to put on the bandages he suddenly spoke. It was as if he had minuted the conversation he had intended to hold, leaving time enough for his purpose, but none to spare.

“Was that Mr. Lee’s eldest daughter?”

“No, my lord, that was Miss Amabel. Miss Lee as was—Mrs. Shafto as is—was married away from us six months ago.”

“Was Miss Lee as handsome as her sister?”

“Bless you! no, my lord. Miss Lee was well enough and showy enough, but Miss Amabel’s quite another thing. Miss Lee may be as handsome so far as features go,

but Miss Amabel is so gentle and full of grace, for all the world she's like nothing but a wave of the sea."

Lord Latimer made no remark. He was pondering on Dorothy's words—wondering first at the exceeding propriety of her simile, and, secondly, how one of Shakespeare's most beautiful comparisons had found a place in her mouth.

Seeing his thoughtfulness, Dorothy winked to herself and added abruptly,

"I always do say, and so I tell my mistress, Miss Amabel was born to be a great lady, and fate is fate."

If Lord Latimer understood the hint contained in her words, he did not appear to do so. He merely observed gravely,

"She does not indeed seem to be formed for household cares."

Then, seeing the last stitch put to the bandage, he released himself from her hands.

"Does your lordship feel quite comfort-

able?" she inquired, with a deep curtsy, and, under new impressions, with greater affability of manner.

"Quite comfortable. I thank you for your assistance."

He took a sovereign from his waistcoat-pocket, placed it gravely in her hand, and before she had risen from the profound obeisance into which she plunged on the reception of the gift, had left the still-room. Mr. Lee met him outside, and they disappeared.

"I could tell he was a nobleman in the dark, and if I was too deaf to hear him called my lord, I should call him so," Dorothy remarked, as she put the sovereign into a large yellow bag, drawn from a table-drawer. She might have passed some further time in contemplation and consideration, but she was conscientious in her duties, and removing all that disturbed the neatness of her still-room, she proceeded at once to her work.

“The cakes will be heavy,” she soliloquised; “that mustn’t be—this night of all nights;” and with great celerity she hastened to prepare a mixture for a fresh batch of the articles in question. There was not time for much thought or play of the imagination, only, as she cracked each fresh egg into the basin, she smiled a smile of wisdom and said, “Fate is fate.”

## CHAPTER IV.

THE dinner that took place at half-past six was of a kind that has been too often described to bear description here. There was a stuffy room and an anxious hostess, too much to eat, and too few hands to administer the food. The preparations had been made on too ambitious a scale, and failure and discomfort were the consequences.

It was rarely that Mrs. Lee was betrayed into such a mistake, and from the very unwonted sense of failure she suffered severely. Two things only gave her comfort, and Lord Latimer, little as he was used to be a comfort to anybody, was the source of both

these subjects of consolation. Her first comfort was that, as well as she could guess, the failures, mischances, and awkwardnesses were unperceived and unfelt by him; and though she was not correct in her guess—for he did see that the meat was cold and the jelly warm, and that the man and boy who waited on fourteen guests spent the chief part of their time in tripping up each other's heels—yet she was correct in the inference she drew. He really did not mind it. Being neither a humourist, nor a gourmand, nor a fidget, he saw without seeing, and observed without feeling. It was not *his* failure, and therefore was nothing to him.

The second source of comfort was from her observation of the direction of Lord Latimer's eyes. Though not a scheming mother, nor even proud of Amabel, she yet could not help perceiving that her guest was engaged in watching her daughter.



While her own anxious gazes were wandering over the dinner-table and peering into the corners of the room, his remained fixed on one spot. He watched her movements, he listened to the sound of her voice ; he watched her as an artist watches, catching graces and peculiarities for his pencil. There was nothing ill-bred in this watchfulness ; it was so managed that the object of it was unconscious of the fact, but, having once been detected, it was too plain to escape observation and comment.

Mrs. Lee saw, and rapidly as Dorothy had drawn a picture in her mind, so rapidly did coming events cast their shadows before *her*.

Though Dorothy was the cakemaker of the Lee family, she was also the general overseer in all departments, and one of her privileges was to attend upon Amabel at night. This night, as she combed out her beautiful hair, she indulged in sundry nods and winks, and sundry audible exclama-

tions on the beauty of her young mistress.

"You shouldn't talk *so*, Dorothy," Amabel said, gently rebuking her. "Mamma would not like it."

"Truth is truth, Miss Amabel, and nobody can *not* see what they *do* see. If I was to say you was ugly, I should deserve to have my tongue bit out at the very roots!"

Amabel smiled. She had a simple pleasure in hearing she was pretty, though it produced no vanity nor consciousness. In her family Sophia was the beauty—that is, she was the beauty in her own eyes—and to no one except Dorothy had it ever occurred to dispute her claim to the title.

"And I think I know, Miss Amabel, who agrees with me. I think I know somebody who could not say you was ugly, if he tried ever so much to say it."

"Who, Dorothy?" Amabel asked, with great interest.

Now, Amabel was more a young lady of

an older day than of the present. She was a little bit sentimental. She liked love-stories better than any stories of good deeds, or great deeds, or wonderful feats, or marvellous villains. A tale of true and devoted love, even if a little bit mawkish, riveted her heart and fancy. And being thus minded, she had of course her dreams about her own far future; but they were dreams as vague—nay, far vaguer than any tale she had read. She never thought of any definite person; had no hero either in her mind or before her eyes. Therefore, when Dorothy proclaimed the fact of this admirer, she, prone as she was to blush, blushed not the least. There was simple curiosity in the “Who?”

“Somebody,” Dorothy said, and gave a jerk to the long hair, and winked at Amabel in the glass; for, being behind her, she could not wink to her own proper face.

“Do tell me, Dorothy. Somebody

who thinks I am pretty, do you mean?"

"Pretty, Miss Amabel! No, I don't mean pretty. I think I know somebody who thinks you the most beautiful young lady he ever saw; and I think he will tell you of it some day."

Still no consciousness; still indifference.

"I can't think whom you mean."

"Then I think you are very dull, Miss Amabel; for others have seen it, as I hear to-night, besides myself, this afternoon. I did hear that there was a nobleman who never so much as took his eyes off you; and hardly ate a bit of his dinner for looking."

"Oh! Dorothy, you shouldn't!" and a shade of pink, which gradually deepened to a deep blush, stole over the young girl's fair face. She looked so lovely as she thus blushed, and cast down her eyes, that Dorothy, seeing the reflection of the loveliness in the glass, stooped down and kissed her, then

begged her pardon, and said, "She couldn't help it."

"You have no business to be so beautiful, Miss Amabel, unless my lord who is here, or some other lord, makes you a lady—for it's a great lady you were cut out for; and fate is fate."

That Dorothy's suggestion was not offensive to Amabel, her deep blush revealed. The ulterior views contained in it indeed escaped her. She would as soon have imagined that she was to be raised to the throne of England, as to dream of being the wife of Lord Latimer; but the thought that she had excited his notice and approbation was very sweet; and though in her innocent lowliness she had not seen the fact till it was pointed out, when pointed out she felt it was true.

All simple minds like to look up, and are pleased with the notice of those above them. In essential points Mr. Lee was a great deal

better than Lord Latimer, and happier, too ; but in the common meaning of the word he was above the Lee family—in name, in wealth, in position ; and Amabel was a great deal too simple-minded not to know this. The very sound of his name had something sweet and harmonious to her ears ; and the thought of his admiration came to her with a glowing and tingling sense of pleasure.

She gradually remembered some little attentions she had received from him. For the first time she had taken Sophia's place, and Lord Latimer had been the first who had not treated her as a child. Involuntarily she had contrasted his manners with the manners of some who still called her "Miss Amabel," addressing her with the familiarity of long acquaintance.

One occurrence in particular came to her recollection. Lord Latimer had brought her a cup of tea. She knowing that, amid many guests, her mother, who made tea at a large

table, would not have time to attend to her, had quietly seated herself aloof. No old acquaintance had remarked this, but Lord Latimer did. She had been astonished at the time; but, supposing the attention to be a specimen of the chivalrous attentions with which all Lord Latimers (a race with which old novels had made her acquainted) treated all young ladies, had received his politeness with a modest yet dignified grace which had charmed him.

When the recollection recurred, she blushed with a deeper sense of pleasure. Perhaps the attention had not been to her as a young lady, but to herself. The thought of his respectful notice raised her in her own eyes, and the charm of that first notice was thrown around the person from whom it came.

## CHAPTER V.

IF Amabel lay down to sleep with some dreamy thoughts concerning Lord Latimer in her head, so also did Mrs. Lee. The occurrence which came to Amabel's recollection had not escaped her notice. *She* had hardly been able to sit still while Lord Latimer carried the cup, and the sight of her daughter's graceful yet quiet reception of the courtesy had made her open her eyes and soliloquise, "I do believe Amabel is born to be a great lady." Thoughts, not dreamy, but very tangible, thronged about her pillow, and kept her, tired as she was, awake.



When Amabel got up the next morning, the pleasant thought of Lord Latimer's notice recurred; and she saw with gratitude that Dorothy had prepared a clean white muslin for her dress for the day. Satisfied with her appearance, she then forgot all about it, and when an early bell rang for prayers, hurried down without a thought of him, or any other of the guests in the house.

She walked up to her father and kissed him, as was her habit, and then first perceived that Lord Latimer was behind him. With a blush and a graceful shy curtsy, she then turned to him, and he held out his hand and said "Good morning." Dorothy saw this as she entered the room with the servants, and the sight certainly distracted her mind from her prayers.

Lord Latimer's early appearance and unexpected attention to his religious duty were a distraction to others also. Mr. Lee was

ashamed to own to himself how very unwilling he was to perform his part before him ; and, not being a good reader, he stumbled through the short service with more than usual stumbling. Mrs. Lee was also extremely put out. She had the breakfast to attend to, and there was he, her chief guest, already installed in the dining-room where the breakfast was laid ! As soon as prayers were over she called Amabel to follow her.

“ You must stay about here, Amabel ; your father is obliged to go out for a few minutes, and I must see that the coffee is good, and the cakes and things properly set out. Go in and out of the dining-room, and take care that Lord Latimer is attended to ; or stay, take these flowers, make up a nosegay, and put it on the table. He said last night that he was very fond of flowers.”

The thought came on the spur of the moment ; but if Mrs. Lee had plotted to show off her daughter, she could not have done it more effectually.

Amabel carried the basket of fresh flowers into the dining-room, and taking an ugly pink flower-pot, ugly, but the only one they possessed of the kind required, proceeded to arrange her flowers. Lord Latimer was buried in a newspaper. Two other gentlemen had by this time appeared, and were standing in the window discussing the show. There was no need to think of anyone, for no one was thinking of her, and Amabel performed her task with the taste that was inherent in her nature. Over the ugly pink flower-pot she drew down green tendrils of various kinds, and then formed in the centre harmonious circles of heliotrope, jessamine, and geraniums.

When it was done she stepped aside to look at her work, and was just stretching out her hands to carry the vase to the breakfast-table, when Lord Latimer put down his newspaper and approached her.

The movement was sudden, but he had

never ceased to watch her. The graceful movements of her hands and arms had given him a sensation of soothing delight, and if on the first moment of seeing her he had not fully decided on what he would do, he had decided now. Indeed he was no longer perfectly a free agent. Something had touched that heart so long cased and robed in self, and it beat with a quickened movement as he approached her.

“I must compliment you on your taste, Miss Lee. Your bouquet is a picture.”

Amabel blushed and smiled, and raised her eyes with a pleased expression to his face. “I am so fond of flowers,” she said.

“And I also. Did you ever read ‘The Winter’s Tale’—Shakespeare’s?”

“No, never, I am afraid.”

“It is hardly likely, hardly to be wished that you should; but I was going to say that you remind me of the Shepherdess Perdita in that play.”

As Amabel had not read it, she could not fully feel the compliment ; but that he was complimenting her she did feel, and she stood shyly to receive his notice ; stood for an instant ; and then wishing to escape from it, stretched out her hands again to the flower-pot.

“Let me do it,” he said ; carried it to the table, and placed it in the middle ; asked if she was satisfied, and then returned to his newspaper.

Amabel fled away to her mother, her own heart beating a little. She was pleased, but she was frightened : when she came back it was under Mrs. Lee’s wing ; and when she chose her place at breakfast, it was by her father’s side, and far away from Lord Latimer.

After breakfast the gentlemen all disappeared for the day. Mrs. Lee was too busy to go to the show, and Amabel did not care for it. She was longing to find a moment

to finish "Evelina," but went dutifully to her mother, to see what she could do to help her.

"Why, nothing, my dear, in that gown," said Mrs. Lee, with a half smile. "Sophia had a regular brown-holland dress in which she used to make her pastry."

"But I can change it, mamma. I did help Dorothy with the cakes yesterday—that is, I was all ready to do it, when I was prevented."

"What prevented you?" Mrs. Lee asked, sharply; for, though she had now settled that Amabel need not make cakes, she did not like her to flinch from her duties.

"Oh! mamma, Lord Latimer came in. Did you not know?" And Amabel, she scarcely knew why, blushed deeply as she related what had occurred.

Mrs. Lee was surprised—surprised at Amabel's tale and Amabel's blush. The thing was as good as settled, she thought;

and yet it was a curious thing that Lord Latimer should choose a wife whom he found making cakes in the still-room. She could not quite understand his views ; but she determined, whatever they were, she would trouble herself no more with Amabel's housekeeping education.

“Well, I don't want any more cakes to-day,” she said, after a moment. “Go and ask Dorothy if she has any mending to do ; and if she has not, you may please yourself, for I am too busy to attend to you.”

Amabel went in search of Dorothy ; but Dorothy had locked her door, and refused to talk or speak. It afterwards appeared she was engaged in freshening up and decorating a gown in which she thought Amabel would appear to advantage—an old gown left by Sophia, when she made a good marriage, for her young sister. Finding her, after several returns to the door, impenetrable, Amabel at last, with an easy

conscience, devoted herself to "Evelina." There came, however, several disturbances in the course of the day, and towards evening it was still unfinished. She stole out to an arbour, and sat down out of the way to finish her story in peace.

But Lord Latimer, on his return home, had expressed a wish to see the garden, and he and Mr. Lee left their horses, and came along a path close to where Amabel sat. Mr. Lee saw his daughter in her place of refuge, and, wishing to spare her the annoyance of a disturbance, struck into a new track.

But Lord Latimer had seen her also, and he paused.

"Is not that Miss Lee?"

"Yes. Amabel!" he now thought it necessary to call; and Amabel started out of her intense study and came forward, blushing with a painful blush—not so much at being thus discovered by Lord Latimer



as by her father ; he thought novels were great trash for girls.

“ You were not at the show to-day,” Lord Latimer observed, courteously.

“ No. I don’t much care for cattle,” Amabel said, with shy apology.

Something almost like a smile passed over his lips.

“ Are you fond of reading ?”

“ Yes, very.”

“ Do you read history ?—do you like it ?”

Another painful blush, and the low reply,

“ I am afraid not much—not so much, at least, as stories.”

“ My daughter is young,” Mr. Lee said, unwilling to have too unfavourable an impression left. “ In a year or two she will like her history as well, I daresay.”

“ That I am sure she will,” Lord Latimer observed ; and with a slight bow he showed himself ready to walk on.

Mrs. Lee's boys had submitted to be deprived of their round game of cards on the night of Lord Latimer's arrival, owing to her suggestion that, as they knew nothing of Lord Latimer and his tastes, it would not do to make a noise ; but, having observed that he was a singularly quiet and inoffensive guest, they on this night resolutely declared that their round game they must have.

In the course of the evening she therefore approached him, mentioned the wish of her sons, and with some trepidation asked him if he would play.

He thanked her. No, he was not a card-player ; but, if Miss Lee was going to play, it would amuse him to watch the game.

Mrs. Lee's face twitched. She hardly knew what to think. She only wished everybody was gone, that she might have a talk with Mr. Lee ; for, as it happened, he had been so extremely taken up with his

gentlemen visitors that she had not been able even to him to suggest her suspicions. She went, however, to send her sons and Amabel to their amusement; and two or three other gentlemen expressed a wish to join in it.

Lord Latimer did not immediately avail himself of the amusement he had provided for himself. It was not indeed amusement that he thought of. He knew enough of human nature to know that at a round game of cards, if sufficiently exciting, a good deal of character displays itself; and though he was convinced that he had made no mistake in the resolution he had taken, he was not sorry to see Amabel under a new aspect. He waited therefore until the game was somewhat advanced, and voices grew loud, and then drew quietly near, placing himself, unperceived, behind the object of his attention.

Amabel was not a lover of cards; she

liked to please her brothers ; but she could not throw herself into the game. So far from wishing to win, she was miserable at every turn of luck in her favour ; and to the best of her power cheated herself, that she might help any brother in distress. This might show an amiable disposition, but it did not make her an interesting addition to a card-table.

To Lord Latimer, however, the picture was delightful. She alone at the table remained gentle, unselfish, sweet-tempered ; her soft voice never rose ; no vexation followed failure, nor exultation success. He was sufficiently charmed and interested after a time to change his position ; he came forward and took his place where he could see the lovely face which had caught such fancy as he had. Nor was he displeased when he saw that his movement affected Amabel—that her ease was gone, that she no longer slipped her counters, unseen, into her bro-

ther's heaps, that her eyes were cast down, and her cheeks blushing. He was not displeased—he felt, on the contrary, a singular sense of pleasure at the sight.

Shortly after this change in his position, a little boy, who had sat on one side of Amabel, was sent to bed, and a noisy squire, whose delight in the game was only equalled by his admiration of the young girl's lovely face, slipped quickly into his place. This noisy squire was not an old acquaintance, but hearing Amabel addressed by another squire as “Miss Amabel,” and seeing that other, who *was* an old acquaintance, treat her with the familiarity of one who hardly knows when it is time to put away childish things, he usurped the same privilege; adding to the childish familiarity a very marked degree of admiration and attention.

Soon after his move, Amabel, who had had a good deal of unwelcome luck, began

to lose ; and the Squire, though hitherto bent entirely on winning for himself, was so taken with his young neighbour that he could not calmly bear her losses. First he fussed himself for her, and finally attempted to cheat for her—a playful, undisguised kind of cheating, but not the less hateful to Amabel—hateful for her brothers' sakes, and hateful from the officious attention to herself which it showed.

She bore it at first with gentle remonstrances, then with little vexed movements ; at last she almost unconsciously raised her eyes and looked with indignant appeal at Lord Latimer.

He had stood by, lost to all sense of himself in the delight with which he watched her. For years and years *himself* had never so slipped out of his memory. And at this glance a thrill ran through him. He moved quietly to the back of her chair, and there took up his position, saying gravely, though

courteously, "I cannot stand by and see unfair play, even though for the benefit of Miss Lee."

Amabel blushed. The good-natured squire with a laugh replied,

"We did not think our tricks were seen, my lord. When there's a lady in the case, common rules give place—eh! Miss Amabel?"

Again Amabel's indignant appealing glance went up to Lord Latimer, and thus it was that he constituted himself her silent protector, and that she resigned herself to the protection of his presence.

When Dorothy, to whom everything that could be seen in the dining-room had been reported, alluded on this night, in bolder language and with broader hints, to Lord Latimer's admiration, the words took a deeper lodging in Amabel's heart. Very vague but very sweet and bright visions flitted before the young girl's mind. Visions

of a distant time in which all the beauty and refinement that she loved should be about her and around her, and Lord Latimer's kind protection about her and around her also.

It was not a first dream of love, nor anything like it; but it was the first definite dream she had had about herself; the first time the incense of silent admiration had been offered to her, and it charmed her. She again invested him who offered it with an ideal charm, and fell asleep with his fixed grave gaze haunting her memory.



## CHAPTER VI.

ON that same evening, as Mr. Lee placed his candle in his hand, and accompanied him to the foot of the stairs which led to his room, Lord Latimer said,

“I should be very glad to say a few words to you, if you are not engaged.”

“I will come in two minutes, my lord,” he said, quite without suspicion ; and returned to a noisy squire, with whom he had just made an engagement to go out and smoke a cigar, to excuse himself.

“I may not be kept,” he said, “but when a man talks of a few words, one never knows what will be the end of it. I fancy he wa

not satisfied with the distribution of the prizes."

Mr. Lee need not have dreaded Lord Latimer's few words, so far at least as the time they occupied was concerned. He had hardly entered the room before the business in hand had been clearly stated.

"I may perhaps surprise you, Mr. Lee, but I consider it right to ask your permission before I address myself to Miss Lee. I wish to make her my wife."

However much he was surprised—and certainly he was surprised—the calm, grave, steady manner allowed Mr. Lee no time to doubt, nor the power of showing excitement. He had to collect his wits as quickly as he could ; to run over in his mind the impossibilities as well as the possibilities of the case ; and to extricate himself from the dilemma as best he might.

"I confess, my lord, I am much surprised," he said. "So much so that, how-

ever flattered I may feel, you must allow me to think it over before—before I answer you. My daughter is young, and her education is not—is not, perhaps, quite fitted for such a position.”

“Pardon me,” said Lord Latimer; “Miss Lee is perfect.”

“You are very good, my lord; but I must beg of you to allow me till to-morrow morning to think it over.”

“By all means. Good night, Mr. Lee. You will be good enough to speak only to Mrs. Lee on the subject.” He bowed, and in two minutes the perplexed father found himself in the passage.

He went to his wife’s room. Her door was open, for she had heard him pass, and was determined to secure a moment’s conversation.

“My dear!” she said, “I must speak to you. Do you know I almost begin to think that Lord Latimer admires Amabel.”

“Admires her!” cried Mr. Lee. “Why, he wants to make her his wife! He has just been telling me so.”

Poor Mrs. Lee! Her little bit of news entirely swallowed up in his large bit, as a large fish swallows a little one.

She gave way to all the excitement he had been forced to restrain, and perhaps might be pardoned if she shewed a little vanity at her daughter's rapid conquest. This was only for a moment, for when Mr. Lee very seriously asked what they were to do, and what it would be most right to do, she entered as seriously as he did into the question. They differed, but differed amicably. Mrs. Lee was more ambitious than Mr. Lee, but she was not a mother to sacrifice her child's happiness to ambition. She had thought very little about Amabel till this day—very little so far as the future was concerned; she had cared for her health, moderately provided for her education, and

of late had lamented her helplessness, but, thankful to keep her still a child, she had not opened her eyes to her beauty or her character. On this day, however, she had thought, and deeply. While she went about her business, while she conversed with her guests, she had all the time been thinking about Amabel. A good deal of thought can be done in a day. More, perhaps, in one hour of true concentrated thought than in a whole year of desultory reflection; and Mrs. Lee had brought out of her serious cogitations the conviction that the life offered to Amabel was the very one cut out for her. A just man to guard and protect her, and a life of ease and refinement to which (so she fancied) the cares of life would not come.

When Mr. Lee therefore sighed and said, "Poor Amabel! we could not marry her to that statue!" Mrs. Lee had her arguments ready. So ready and so well-expressed

that Mr. Lee was struck by their force, and gave way to them, not with submission, but with conviction. There was to be no force or persuasions, but Lord Latimer was to have permission to woo Amabel if he pleased.

“I suppose,” Mrs. Lee said, “I may just give Amabel a hint?”

“No, no,” replied Mr. Lee. “Every man’s right is to propose in his own way, and Lord Latimer shall have his rights. Leave Amabel to him. I wonder,” he continued, as he turned to leave the room, “what steps he will take? Do you suppose,” after a moment, coming back, and speaking as softly as if Lord Latimer might be concealed behind the curtains, “that we shall not be rid of him to-morrow?”

For an instant he had forgotten that he was speaking of a possible son-in-law, and recurred to his previous hope that his guest, however inoffensive and amiable, would

relieve him of his presence the following day.

“Oh! of course all is changed,” Mrs. Lee said. “We must invite him to stay, if he pleases.”

“Yes, yes, of course.”

But Mr. Lee's heart sank a little at the thought. He liked Lord Latimer—he had seen nothing that was unamiable, nothing that could be justly criticized, in him or his behaviour; but still he oppressed him. That grave, quiet, refined lifelessness sat like a kind of day nightmare on his spirits.

He need not, however, have troubled himself with the fears of a prolonged visit, any more than he had had need to dread a prolonged conversation. As soon as he appeared at prayers the following morning, Lord Latimer alluded to his departure—he said he had delayed it for a few hours, as he wished to speak to Mrs. Lee about her daughter.

Mr. Lee would naturally have been shocked to find that his guest meant to dawdle throughout the morning in his house; but after the anticipations that have been mentioned, the relief was great; and he answered with courteous cheerfulness.

As soon as breakfast was over, he told Mrs. Lee to go into the drawing-room, and he would bring Lord Latimer to her. Amabel was allowed to slip away unmolested.

Mrs. Lee got herself ready for a long talk. She went over all she should say and all he would say; she planned and laid out how the courtship was to be arranged. Audricourt was sixty miles from Mr. Lee's house—meetings, therefore, could not take place in a casual way. She was occupied in preparing some suggestions on this subject, when Lord Latimer entered, and again put to flight all pre-conceived ideas.

He told her that, having received Mr. Lee's, and—he believed through him—her



permission to address himself to her daughter, he came to beg of her to allow him an interview. He should be glad to have the matter settled before his departure.

Mrs. Lee concealed her surprise, and murmured only, that of course Amabel was quite unprepared.

“Perhaps so,” he said; “but I should be glad, if you will allow me, to speak to Miss Lee myself. Either now, or later, as it suits your convenience.”

“I can call her in a moment,” Mrs. Lee replied; and then added, hesitatingly, “Shall you wish to see her alone?”

“By no means. I will not detain you long; and she will no doubt be glad of your protection.”

“I will call her, then.”

And in five minutes Mrs. Lee returned with her daughter. Partly her recollection of Mr. Lee’s words that every man had a right to propose in his own way, and still

more, a feeling of curiosity concerning the whole affair—what Lord Latimer meant to say, and how Amabel would behave—kept her silent concerning the business in hand. She looked for her daughter, and having found her in the school-room, engaged in reading a story to her little sister, Virginia, the youngest of the family, she arranged her hair, disordered by the child's fingers, before she said a word. But this was a common habit of Mrs. Lee's; and Amabel submitted with her usual docility. She then said,

“Come into the drawing-room, my dear, to Lord Latimer.”

“What for, mamma?” Amabel said, blushing deeply.

“He is going to-day, you know; and he wishes to see you. Come along.”

Unsuspiciously, yet with some inward trepidation, Amabel followed her mother. As has been said, Amabel was very fond of old novels, and her experience in such little

adventures as the present was much greater than that of her practical mother. She was unsuspicious as to what Lord Latimer really purposed, but she felt she was an object of his notice, and she expected some further development of this notice. She trembled a little, but was not disagreeably agitated.

The shy grace with which she entered was the very attitude which pleased Lord Latimer best, which he admired most. His admiration warmed and animated him. Shy himself he could not be. He was too full of himself, and too certain of all he did being well done, to be so ; yet he was human, and he had felt uncomfortable while he waited. Something like anxiety too had stolen over him. His feeling for Amabel had become a very true one. He was in love with her in all the sense of the term, and though he did not face the possibility of rejection, yet while he waited anxiety rose in his mind. Altogether, the relief of her

entrance, and her extreme beauty as she timidly followed her mother, took him by storm, and warmed and animated him.

He went forward a few steps, and held out his hand. She thought he was going to say good-bye, and she gave it, raising her eyes and making at the same moment that modest graceful inclination of her head, which it came naturally to her to make to her elders and betters.

This completely bewitched and overset him—overset him from his usual stately balance ; and without full consciousness, he raised her little hand with answering courtesy to his lips.

Amabel then blushed deeply, and tried to draw back ; but he held her hand fast.

“Stay,” he said, “I have something to say to you.”

He led her on into a window that stood near, and looking down upon her fixedly, said, “Will you be my wife?”

The accents were soft. No lover's could have been softer or more heartfelt. His sisters would have said that in such tones he could not speak. They entered into, and pierced Amabel's young heart. She gave a little start ; half raised her eyes again, and then blushing crimson, stood trembling and silent before him.

"Do not be frightened," he said with great gentleness. "I will not hurry you to decide ; but if you will, you will make me very happy."

"Oh ! am I fit ?" she cried, as she glanced again in his face. It was bending so fondly over her, that it re-assured her.

"You are indeed. I have chosen you out of all the world to be my own, if you will let me ; and I will care for you as your father has done."

She could not speak, but she glanced up again, and there was nothing forbidding in the shy soft glance she gave.

“Shall it be so, then?” and he took the hand he held and placed it between both his own. “Will you let me be your protector henceforward, while I live?”

“I think so,” she murmured timidly.

“You shall consider of it. I will go now, and your mother shall let me know.”

He kissed her hand again, shook Mrs. Lee’s warmly, and left the room.

Mrs. Lee had stood by very awkwardly. She had felt much inclined to desire Amabel to speak out; but wisely refraining from that, and all other interferences, simply stood by and heard it all. She could hardly get over her astonishment at the whole thing. Lord Latimer’s very apparent love for her daughter, and Amabel’s acquiescence in it. She had hardly heard her murmured words; but she saw there was no reluctance. It was very strange, and quite out of her line of experience. When Sophia married, Mr. Shafto had kept her for six weeks

on tenter-hooks. She had never been sure whether he meant anything or not; and when she began to feel sure about him, Sophia had chosen to puzzle and alarm her; and now here was the acquaintance, and the courtship, and the proposal all arranged in two days.

“My dearest child,” she said, going up to Amabel, who stood trembling in the window, “I am sure I congratulate you with all my heart.”

“Do you, mamma? Do you think I am fit?”

“Oh! yes, of course you are fit, if Lord Latimer thinks so.”

“But do you, mamma? You have always said I was so unfit.”

“Ah! that is for other things.” And she smiled. “I daresay Lord Latimer will not ask you to make pastry.”

“But, mamma, I should like to make a good wife.”

Amabel's words, and the earnestness with which they were said, changed the current of Mrs. Lee's reflections. She became thoughtful, then said, with seriousness,

"To be a really good wife, Amabel, you must love your husband. If you love him, you are sure to be faithful and obedient. Do you think you will love Lord Latimer?"

"If I marry him, of course I shall, mamma. I am not afraid of not being obedient; but I seem so unfit."

Mrs. Lee saw that Amabel's thoughts were not her thoughts; and that to argue from her point of view would be useless. She only kissed her, therefore, and desired her to think over the matter, as Lord Latimer had advised. As to being fit or unfit, he was the best judge of that. And having so said, she left her to herself.

Shortly afterwards she saw Lord Latimer and Mr. Lee walking in the garden. Lord Latimer then returned to take leave of her,



and thank her for receiving him. He should expect, he said, to hear from her in a few days; and would write his views further.

“So Amabel accepted him,” Mr. Lee said when his guest was gone. “What is the poor child about?”

Mrs. Lee, in her heart, joined in this sentiment; but as Mr. Lee took this view of the question, she took another, and showed how natural it was.

Mr. Lee listened to her arguments, but was hardly persuaded. Amabel was his darling—a discovery he had only just made; and no gratified vanity in her conquest could reconcile him to the idea of parting with her at seventeen, to be the wife of “that statue.” He was very much overset, in fact, by the idea.

“But no one can say we had a hand in it,” he said. “I asked him here because Sir Richard Glover begged me to do it, for

the good of the Society. I am sure I was far from wishing to put Amabel in his way. It seems one of those chances people call providential; and so we must hope it will be for her happiness, poor child."

"What has he been saying to you?" Mrs. Lee asked.

"Oh! about his affairs and settlements—all most generous. Whatever I please to ask, in fact. He says he is rich, that there *was* a debt on the property, but his father's care paid it off, and he is now perfectly unincumbered. Good fortunes for younger children, and everything that can be wished. If the man had a little life in him, I should not mind; but I feel, as I walk with him, as if I was in a treadmill."

"He will improve with marriage," Mrs. Lee said, decidedly. "All men do."

"Do they?" he asked, and smiled and shook off his gravity.

## CHAPTER VII.

NO change came over Amabel's mind. She did not even seem to contemplate the possibility of a change. However strange it might be to those about her, she herself seemed to accept her destiny as a destiny—as the position in life allotted to her; to think Lord Latimer's choice of her enough; he chose her, and she had but to make herself fit.

Except on this subject of her fitness, there seemed no fear or uneasiness in her mind; no cogitations about whether or not she loved him enough. And, seeing it to be so, her father and mother left her alone.

After three days Mrs. Lee wrote her final answer to Lord Latimer; and he, in return, sent her a hoop-ring of rubies, which he requested Amabel to wear as a ring of betrothment.

This was his only special message to her; and it was a message, not a letter. He asked for no letter in return. Possibly he guessed how difficult it would be for her to write; possibly it was difficult to himself. He left all such love-making alone.

To Mrs. Lee he wrote several times. First, to ask for the marriage to take place as soon as possible; then to make a few inquiries about Amabel's taste—what colour she preferred; if she had any favourite books, any favourite occupations; then to beg of her not to think it necessary to provide a large trousseau. When she was his wife, it would be a pleasure to him to give her all that she liked best.

His letters were all in the same style,

kind, grave, and concise. It was very easy to transact business with him, and all went smoothly until he wrote to inquire what she intended to do about a maid for her daughter. Now Amabel and Dorothy had settled it between them that Dorothy was to go with her to be her attendant, and nurse, and friend; and Mrs. Lee, though with some perturbation, wrote to inform him of this fact. She made out a very good letter on the subject. She guessed, from the wording of *his* letter, that it would not be a welcome arrangement; but she thought, young as Amabel was, that it was a proper one, and she intended to hold to it. She told him, therefore, all her reasons.

His answer was anxiously expected, but on the expected day no answer came. Mrs. Lee was uneasy. Mr. Lee was excited.

"The poor child shall have Dorothy, that I am determined," he said, with vehemence.

"It will never do to break off the

marriage on that account," said Mrs. Lee.

"Yes, let him break off the marriage and welcome," cried her husband.

The next morning, still no answer came. Late in the afternoon, however, to the consternation of Mrs. Lee (Mr. Lee was out) Lord Latimer arrived.

Immediately on his arrival, even before he asked for Amabel, he said he had thought it best to come in person to answer her letter. If it was convenient to her, he would stay for the night. If not, he would go a part of the way homewards.

It was extremely inconvenient to Mrs. Lee, for she was quite unprepared for a guest; but at the same time she could not but feel it was right for Amabel to see a little more than she had done of her future husband, and she gave as gracious an invitation as she could. He then asked to see Amabel, saying he wished to talk to her about her attendant.

Mrs. Lee was both relieved and angry. His manner was so very grave and formal that the idea of an argument with him was not inviting; yet she had determined to stick to this point, and she did not wish to be put aside.

“I will call her,” she said, hesitatingly; “but——”

“If Miss Lee is extremely anxious on this subject, I will see what can be done,” he said, interrupting her; “but I should prefer to talk the matter over with her before I discuss it with others.”

When Amabel came to him, his grave formality melted away. Mrs. Lee brought her to the door, but receiving on this occasion no invitation to remain, she retreated—not, however, before she had seen and been cheered by that thawing and melting of his face.

“He really loves her,” she said, as she walked away, and some very uncomfortable

feelings, which his stiffness had produced, melted from her countenance also.

Lord Latimer found, with great satisfaction, that nothing had been said to Amabel on the subject under discussion. He asked her what she wished to do about a maid, and she replied that, if he had no objection, she should like to have Dorothy.

“It was Dorothy who dressed your arm,” she said, lifting her eyes to his in explanation, “she is clever, and very kind.”

He paid some compliments to Dorothy, but then entered on the question. He told her the cause of his visit, and the correspondence he had had with her mother, and then stated his reasons for being against the proposed measure.

His reasons were obvious and just. He spoke of them clearly and quietly, and as to a sensible woman; and Amabel saw them with the common sense which is often the gift of simple minds. Dorothy was not



quite fitted to the place designed ; and however agreeable it might be for Amabel to have her, it was not perhaps, on her entrance into so new a life, a wise indulgence. Neither she nor Dorothy might be able to keep to their proper positions.

Amabel saw it, and yet she hungered for the indulgence still. "She has always taken such care of me," she said, and a tear came into her eye. "I think I should miss her care."

He was moved.

"No, my child," he said fondly, "you shall not, for I will take more care of you than Dorothy has ever done." And he put his arm round her, and kissed her cheek, as with a father's fond kiss.

"It shall be just as you like," Amabel said, looking up confidently.

And so it was that this difference of opinion became a bond of union.

Mrs. Lee, when she found Amabel had

given way, was wise enough not to argue. And Dorothy, though bitterly disappointed, loved Amabel well enough to conceal her regrets, and say it was best as it was.

“Little Miss Virginia will want me,” she said, with an heroic laugh. “Why, I must bring *her* up to be fit for a king, I suppose.”

The evening passed off tolerably well. Mr. Lee was certainly upset when he found he was to pass the evening in a treadmill, instead of lounging at his ease; but he felt like his wife that it was right, and resigned himself to that consideration. Lord Latimer very early in the evening took up a book, and after a few stray glances at it, sat down and read it in peace; and when Mr. Lee saw this, he thought he might read his newspaper in peace also. The boys retired to their own rooms to have the noisy games their mother would not permit, and she and Amabel sat and worked. *She* felt it

was very dull. She was a woman full of cares, full of plans, full of interest in life, in her own and her neighbours' doings, and a hundred times she was bursting out with some inappropriate speech, when she suddenly recalled the presence in which she sat ; she would then take a furtive glance at Amabel, making a kind of silent inquiry how she felt under the circumstances.

Amabel looked quiet and serene ; on two of these occasions her mother saw, and wondered at, a deep blush on her cheek ; wondered what thoughts or emotions produced such a show of feeling. To her, everything seemed far too cool and placid to blush about.

But Amabel thought otherwise. She could not refrain from every now and then stealing a glance at Lord Latimer, and on every occasion that this secret glance was given she was discovered ; she met his gaze gently

and softly fixed on her. Then in confusion she cast down her eyes, and resolved to look no more. Yet in a quarter of an hour or so, the same silent play was repeated.

It was very quiet love-making, but it sent Amabel to bed with glowing cheeks and a beating heart.

Before his departure the next morning, Lord Latimer himself tied a diamond locket containing his hair round Amabel's neck; and having done so, and begged her to wear it always, put into her hands a note for twenty pounds.

"You will wish to give presents to your family," he said, stooping and speaking low, for Mrs. Lee was near.

"Oh! thank you," Amabel said, raising her eyes swimming with gratitude to his. "What can I do to please *you*?"

"You please me enough by accepting it," he said with a look of adoration, and he kissed her little hand as he left her.

It was true, he asked for nothing more than to be allowed to shower his attentions on his new-found idol.

## CHAPTER VIII.

LORD LATIMER came no more till the morning of his wedding-day. On the night before he slept at the nearest town, and drove over in the morning. This was his own arrangement, and was a great relief to Mrs. Lee.

Lord Latimer was, as has been said, extremely just. Justice is not a very common quality, but kindly feeling generally supplies its place. In Lord Latimer it was remarkably developed, and supplied the place of kindlier feeling. He considered what he liked himself; from thence drew his inferences how to behave justly to his fellow-men ; and

certainly tried to conform himself to the inferences he drew. He felt that he was longing to have Amabel to himself, and therefore he justly thought that her parents would be glad to have her to themselves so long as she was under their care. Having so made up his mind, he arranged his plans accordingly.

Nor was it only in this point that he was just. He hated all fuss; he would have liked to walk off and be married and have done with it. But he considered that Amabel was a daughter in her father's house, and it was for them, and not for him, to settle how she should leave it. He made no inquiries, therefore, and no stipulations; and submitted himself to all that he must go through, with grave indifference.

The marriage was not very grand; but there were a good many of the family and friends to be asked, and Amabel herself had wished to have a pretty train of bridesmaids.

She had a natural sense of beauty, which made pretty things almost a necessity to her. Her taste had never been cultivated, and was probably not high; but, as far as it went, it required food—and good food. She could not help being prettily-dressed, however poor the material might be, if left to herself; and if it was otherwise—if her mother made a bad or careless choice—her sweet temper was fretted by it. She did not know what depressed her, but she *was* unhappy and depressed.

Under her care, therefore, all was prettily done, and Lord Latimer himself was pleased with the arrangements that had been made.

Mr. and Mrs. Shafto had arrived from abroad the day before. With them he had to make acquaintance, and he felt thankful that his acquaintance began at so late a date. He felt that, had Mrs. Shafto been at home, he should have had more difficulty in securing his prize; and his feeling was correct.



Mrs. Shafto was handsome, quick, and lively, not at all unamiable in reality, but with some faults that made her at times appear unamiable. She belonged to the order of Mademoiselle J'Ordonne's, the heroine of an old French story, perhaps unknown to the present generation. Mademoiselle J'Ordonne liked to order everything and everybody, and never thought a thing well done unless she had a hand in it; and so did Mrs. Shafto.

Mrs. Lee dreaded Sophia's arrival at this moment. She had used strong expressions of disapprobation at Amabel's marriage, in her letters, and the mother was never quite able to cope with her daughter. Like Antony in the presence of Octavius Cæsar, her spirit became small. On all other occasions, and to all other people, she was more than able to stand on her own ground; but when Sophia criticised she was perplexed.

Sophia was a little put out at Amabel's

marriage. On her first return after her own marriage, and from abroad too, she had expected to be all in all. It was certainly trying to find every head full of Amabel. She, therefore, expressed herself with extra strength in commenting on the event.

“You know what I think, mamma, by my letters ; but I must once talk it over with you. It seems to me a most extraordinary step to have taken.”

“It was, indeed ; but it was taken by Amabel and Lord Latimer. I assure you, Sophia, neither your father nor I had anything to do with it. Your father was very averse to it at first.”

“I don’t wonder. I only wonder at his consenting at all. You do not seem to consider the strangeness of the circumstances ; and how little they can know of each other !”

“I think Lord Latimer is very much in love with Amabel ; and that, you know, is everything.”

“Oh ! I am not afraid of Lord Latimer.

An old man is sure to be in love with a pretty young girl."

"Lord Latimer is not old, Sophia," Mrs. Lee said, with asperity.

He was ten years younger than she was; and she was far from considering herself advanced in years.

"You know what I mean, mamma—he is not a young man. A young man likes to have a little intellect. Pierce would never have married a fool! But a man of Lord Latimer's age likes a young gentle thing like Amabel; and cares very little about brains. I am not afraid of *him*—it is for Amabel I fear. In two years' time she will be a different person from what she is now—she will be handsomer, and her mind will have opened; and then if she comes to see the world, and see people admiring her, what may be the end of it?"

"I do not think Amabel is the sort of girl . . ." began Mrs. Lee.

"Oh! mamma, every girl is the sort of

girl. Unless a woman loves her husband, she must be in danger. You are putting Amabel in a dreadful position. It is like a person walking blindfold over hot ploughshares. She *may* escape, but if she does chance to set her foot on one, she must be burnt."

Mrs. Lee did not know what to say. If Sophia spoke disagreeably, she spoke truth, and she made her uneasy—that is, she made her brain uneasy. She had all the while a confidence in Amabel that resisted the force of the arguments which she owned to be forcible.

"I wish we had said she must wait six months," she observed.

"I wish so, too ; then I should have had nothing to say ? Why did you not ?"

"I did not think of it. And if I had, I doubt if your father would have liked it—he hates things to hang on. Do you remember when Pierce said he wished to be

married in three weeks, how he said ‘All right?’ And you would have been married in three weeks if you had not resisted yourself.”

Sophia laughed.

“It did not matter for me, mamma—I was not a common girl. If I had been married in one week, I should have known my own mind. Amabel is different. Is it impossible to put the marriage off?”

“Oh! quite,” Mrs. Lee said, scared at the idea.

“May I speak to Amabel, mamma, and give her some good advice? I cannot bear to think that she should go blindly into this affair.”

“Certainly, Sophia,” she replied, with uneasiness. “I can have no objection to your giving her good advice. But you must be careful how you speak. It would not do to draw back now; and it would be a pity to frighten her.”

"I don't see that, mamma. It is never too late to draw back from a false step. But don't be alarmed," seeing her mother's startled face, "I should never think of interfering in that way—that is yours and papa's business, not mine. But I should like to open Amabel's eyes to the seriousness of the step she is taking. I don't think she is awake to it at all."

"Well, I must trust you to be discreet," Mrs. Lee said. "Amabel is an affectionate, well-principled little thing, and seems to me to be inclined to do her duty, without arguing about it. That is my feeling about her. But if you think advice is necessary, I will not of course forbid it."

"You may trust me, mamma. I will be very discreet," and she left her mother and went in search of Amabel.

Amabel had just given Dorothy a few favourite books, and other small treasures to pack, and now looking at her dismantled

room, began to feel she was leaving it for ever. She had not thought much of this. She was a dreamer, but not a thinker. At any moment her fancy and imagination might be at work, were at work, but it required something strong and definite to bring her mind to definite thought, especially painful thought. . It was still a child's mind, touched with a young girl's romancing, but nothing more.

She sat down in the window and cried softly. And it was thus that Sophia found her. It seemed to Sophia a propitious moment, and she said kindly,

“What are you crying about, Amabel? Are you unhappy?”

“Oh! no,” drying her eyes and looking up cheerfully, “not at all unhappy; only sorry.”

“I was very much surprised to hear of your marriage. What made you marry Lord Latimer?”

“He chose me,” Amabel said with simple confidence.

“Yes,” and Sophia laughed; “but it does not follow that you were to agree to be chosen. If Sir Richard Glover had chosen you, should you have married him?”

Sir Richard Glover was a favourite aversion of Amabel’s. He was forty; portly, noisy, and good-natured; and even since her engagement had called her “Miss Amabel,” and complimented her freely.

She shuddered.

“Oh! no, Sophia.”

“Then that was not the reason. What was it, for you hardly knew him?”

Amabel blushed, and looked startled.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“My dear Amabel, my reason for asking you is, that I want you to think a little on the subject. I suppose you know that every woman ought to love her husband better than anybody else in the world?”



“Oh ! yes ; and I will, and I shall !”

“Unless they do, the world is a very dangerous place ; especially when they marry as young as you are going to do, before they really know their own minds. How do they know that they may not see somebody that they like better than their husbands ?”

“Oh ! Sophia, I would not do such a thing for the whole world !”

“That is right ; but still I say you must take care. You will probably go into the world and see a great many people, many people much younger than Lord Latimer ; and as you know, and there is no use in denying it, that you are handsome, you will very likely have people admiring you. You must be on the watch and take care of yourself. I give you this advice for your good ; I am sure you will try to do right, but if you are not careful you may be made very unhappy without your knowing it.”

“But, Sophia,” and a tear fell from Amabel’s eyes, “it is Lord Latimer who must take care of me. I never could watch and take care for myself.”

Sophia made a little movement of impatience. The feeling in her mind was that Amabel was really a simpleton, and could not be made to understand.

“Oh! well, Amabel,” she said, “I have no more to say. If you don’t see what I mean, it is no use arguing about it.”

“I mean to be a good wife,” Amabel said, pathetically—“I do, indeed.”

“I hope you will; and I am sure I hope you will be a happy one. Now I have done. Only remember, if a time of trial ever comes, that I have warned you.”

Sophia was honest; and she told her mother that she believed her advice had been quite needless.

“But I can’t understand Amabel,” she added; “she gave me no reason for marry-

ing Lord Latimer, except that he had chosen her, and doesn't seem to see what a poor reason that is. I suppose some minds never think."

Mrs. Lee had become very fond of Amabel since she had begun to think about her, and she did not like this slighting way of speaking of her.

"Amabel has very good sense," she said; "but she is a peculiar child, and I don't think we quite understand her. Marriage is a great lottery," she added, with a sigh. "You have made me uncomfortable, Sophia; but my trust is that God will protect a little innocent thing like that, and I try to banish fears."

Sophia had intended to say a few words to Lord Latimer on the same subject. She wished him to understand that a great thing had been done in allowing him to have Amabel. She had no idea, she said to her husband, of letting him think that *he* was

the person who conferred a favour. And she was quite right. But, somehow, when she saw him she was not able to impress him either with this truth, nor yet with fears for Amabel's future. In fact, she found herself baffled in her attempts to converse with him. He was perfectly civil, but he shrank from her ; and though Sophia was bold, she could not grapple with his impenetrable reserve.

The marriage passed off as other marriages do, and the gentle young girl of seventeen was Lady Latimer. The parting was a very sad one. None of the family had known how dear Amabel was till they were losing her ; and she had never thought how much they loved her, or how much she loved them, till the time of separation came.

A diversion was created by Dorothy. While the whole family stood at the door to see her off, Dorothy rushed through the crowd, calling out, " Her ladyship's bottle !"

Whether it was intended as a diversion to the sadness, or whether she was determined to have the last look at Amabel in the carriage, cannot be known ; but both purposes were answered. The sobbing boys burst into hysterical laughter, and Mr. Lee, who stood at the carriage-door, gave way, while Dorothy mounted on the steps and handed in a little smelling-bottle.

They drove off. Amabel lay back in the carriage and sobbed with a bitterness that annoyed Lord Latimer. Yet he was just ; and though annoyed—though almost irritated at the sight of grief in which he had no share, of emotion the violence of which he could scarcely understand, he allowed the grief to have its course for a time. When he thought it exceeded the bounds of justice, he laid his hand gently on her hand and was about to speak.

But at the first touch of his hand she looked up.

“You must not mind,” she said, with confiding gentleness. “It is only that I am sorry to leave them all—I never left them before.”

Her gentle apology, her confidence in him, touched him inexpressibly. The words of remonstrance died away, and his whole heart was in the fond assurance he gave that she should never miss the care and love of those she had left behind. In a moment of emotion the human heart, and the intellect also, is very quick to discern the feelings of others; it feels and sees, is soothed or repelled by a movement of the hand, by a tone in the voice, by a phrase or a word. Amabel felt that her husband loved her, and was comforted.

At the end of the first stage—for they were posting across country—they stopped. Here Lord Latimer had ordered luncheon to be ready; and here he had ordered Amabel's new maid to be in waiting to

attend upon her. He desired Amabel to lie down and rest; and sent her some luncheon by her new attendant.

Mrs. Lee had been displeased at not being allowed to see this new attendant; and, but for Mr. Lee's advice, would have made a fuss about it. Yet Lord Latimer had acted, as he thought, for the best, and had hit upon the plan as a kind and considerate one. And so it was according to his views. He wished Amabel to begin a new life with him, and thought it advisable that her attendant should have no old hints to go upon. Such being the case, he had certainly provided that they should begin their acquaintance at the earliest possible moment.

He had chosen a kind, quiet, respectable woman—a relation of his own housekeeper's. When she had been a few minutes in her company, Amabel felt still further cheered and comforted. Her attendant, touched with the youth and softness and tear-stained

eyes of her young mistress, insensibly assumed a protecting manner; and Amabel, who was happy always when cared for, went on the rest of her journey in a happier spirit.



## CHAPTER IX.

FOR the few days following his marriage, Lord Latimer was not quite himself. It was a strange thing to the man of thirty-five—who for all those years, even when he had, so to say, felt and loved, had felt and loved mechanically, had felt the natural feelings of charity, had loved with the natural affections of human nature, but without any glow of human kindness, but without any warmth in the affection—to be violently and passionately agitated by the feelings of the heart. It was an overwhelming thing, and the balance of the man's nature was upset by it.

For a few days he was in a state of ex-

citement of which, had he been conscious, he would have been ashamed. But he was not conscious. To be full of oneself is not to know oneself; and Lord Latimer was as unconscious of his faults or virtues, the habits or feelings of his mind, as an infant might be. Whatever he did was right and natural in his eyes. This was the conviction that had been impressed on him in youth, and which remained engraven. But even this he did not know.

He yielded, therefore, to his excitement with the same simplicity with which he had formerly yielded to his dulness, and in this excitement he certainly for a time was not himself. He had but one object, and that was to win, to please, to bind to himself, the fair and gentle being whom he had chosen. He left his routine of employments to devote himself to her; showed her his grounds, his flowers, his drives, his pictures, his gems and jewels; told her his plans—

poured out, in short, his own self before her, laid his own self, and all that he had, at her feet.

Yet, though the balance was overset, it must be remembered that the nature was the same. It was still himself that was present to his mind ; it was for himself that he tried to win her. The question how far self-love and self-interest may properly act on human nature is a metaphysical and difficult one ; but it is more clear that there are two kinds of love—one which loves, and desires to please the person loved, that he or she may be happy ; and another which desires to please a person loved, that his or her love may make the individual self happy.

Thus, if Lord Latimer's heart had been set on simply making Amabel happy, he would have tried to find out and enter into her pleasures, her thoughts, her affections ; he would have entered into her old life, and made himself one with her in the old

as in the new. But it was not so. This did not occur to him. He tried to make her new life happy, because it was with him—to draw out her interest in her new home, for his own sake ; the past he forgot, for he had nothing to do with it.

He succeeded in making Amabel happy. She was of that nature to which to be made much of, cared for, and directed, in itself gives happiness ; while to look up, and to strive to please, gives entire satisfaction and occupation to the mind. She was, besides, grateful, very grateful, for his choice of her, and the love and care with which he encompassed her ; and gratitude is an enlivening and animating sensation. It is true some say otherwise, and there are certainly cases in which gratitude is painful. But still in itself gratitude is a sweet incense to receive, and still sweeter to give ; and when purely and simply excited towards one whom we esteem and love, is as like the temper of

the spirits of the unseen world as anything on earth can be. It gave a halo to this part of Amabel's life. She woke with the sense of it in the morning; it animated her endeavours all the day, and she lay down at night wondering how she had deserved to be Lord Latimer's cherished wife.

After a short time the excitement passed by, and Lord Latimer returned to his sane and sober self. He was, perhaps, improved; a love such as he felt for his young wife could not be without some good qualities in it. The desire to please another, though for his own sake, could not but shake a little of self out of the soul, and out of the thoughts, and out of the habits, which are the clothing of the thoughts; but with this allowance he may be said to have returned to himself.

A time of excitement at his age is not what it is in early youth. Then the powers, vigorous, curious, and active, hardly know

weariness. The body may be tired, but the mind rarely is. At five-and-thirty the mind has lost its curiosity ; it has become accustomed to go in a settled track ; and disturbance, though grateful for awhile, wearies the mind, though the body is strong. Lord Latimer insensibly felt this weariness. He was very happy, but he wished to join his happiness to his old quiet life, instead of living a new life in his happiness ; and no sooner did the feeling of this wish arise than he began to act on it.

To fall into a routine of life, is the natural result of living much alone. Even Lord Chesterfield, who had been the life and soul of society, finding after he became deaf that some routine was necessary to enable him to get through his days, divided the hours of the day by the size of the books he read. It is a great thing, when the hours hang heavy and the spirits are dull, to have an occupation ready made to turn to.

This is the advantage of routine. But it has a danger as great as its advantage. The man may become a mere machine; the routine even of study may be gone through without a spark of intellect being excited.

Into this routine Lord Latimer had naturally fallen in his lonely years. It had satisfied him. It had made life pass quietly. He had now become accustomed to it, and he fell into his old track. Nor for himself alone. Formal routine had lodged itself in his brain as a necessary of life, and he began to bring it forth for the use of Amabel. He arranged her day for her. At such an hour she was to read in her boudoir; at such an hour to walk in the garden; at such an hour to sit and work in the drawing-room; at such an hour to drive; and at such an hour to return home.

This was the first rough sketch of the day. He proposed it to her gently and

kindly, explaining to her the usefulness of rules, the time they would save, the advantage to her mind, the order they would bring into the whole house.

Amabel, docile, loving, and confiding, received his words as the words of Solomon, and promised complete obedience.

"I have been very idle, I know, at home," she said with a deep blush, "mamma often told me of it."

"In a large family exactness is difficult," he said gravely, "one person interferes with another. But you and I, my Amabel, may make our own rules, and no one can quarrel with us."

Amabel blushed at the "You and I;" the position seemed so exalted. The expression took her thoughts from the grave manner, and she said with her shy grace,

"You must make the rules, and I promise I will do all I can to keep them."

The docile manner touched him, as it



never failed to do, and he ended by a few kisses and words of love. And the rules began under fair auspices.

About a week afterwards he asked her if she ever visited the poor.

"Oh ! yes, often," she replied with eagerness.

"In what way?" he inquired.

He had not asked her much about her home ways, and though she had not consciously remarked this, she felt pleased now to speak.

"Almost every day mamma kept something from dinner to send them, and, as I was less busy than Sophia, I generally took it. And she had a sort of club for poor women—just a few—and I used to collect the pennies for her ; and sometimes, but not often, she told me to read to them, when they were ill."

"All very right," he said, with a look of grave meditation.

“I did say to mamma, when I wrote yesterday,” Amabel continued, as he did not speak, “how much I should like to do something for the poor here, and I asked her advice as to whether I should speak to you about it.”

“And why did you not ask me at once?” he said, a slight accent of displeasure in his tone.

“I was not quite sure whether it was right—” she stopped and blushed deeply—“I mean whether it was what you would like me *now* to do.” She meant as his wife, but had not courage to call herself so.

“Another time,” he said, gently, but still gravely, “ask me what you wish at once, and without fear. I will tell you freely if I do not approve. You are not afraid of me?”

“Oh! no.” And she looked up with a blush and a smile that insensibly relaxed and softened his manner, though he continued his lecture.

“Understand, my Amabel, that I wish to have your perfect confidence. Tell me all your thoughts, all your troubles, if you have any ; ask my advice if you need it. It is my duty, it is my pleasure also, to be your friend and protector, as well as your husband.”

The last words were very gently spoken, and Amabel said, with heartfelt gratitude,

“Oh ! thank you ; and indeed I always will go to you for help.”

“And now to return to what I was saying. I wish you to attend to the poor. It is our duty to provide for those who depend upon us ; and there are many here who naturally look to me, and therefore to you, as their helper. But I think it should be done on system, and not quite in the ways you speak of. If you wish to send a dinner to a poor woman, as may sometimes be necessary, you can order the housekeeper to do it. As to the club, there is one already established, the management of which I

placed in the hands of Mrs. Hatchford, the clergyman's wife. I will take you to call on her, and if you please to have the management in your own hands, I have no objection. We will talk it over, and arrange the days and hours on which you can attend to it. Nothing can be done without regularity."

Amabel made no objections; she had perfect confidence in him; only when he went on, "With regard to visiting," and then paused and meditated, she ventured a little soft exclamation, "That is what I should like best!"

"You shall have it," he said, "in due measure. But there must be rules, bounds and limits. Your judgment was so far right that I should not wish you now to act quite as you would at your old home. I have a dislike to the gossiping way in which some persons go about among the poor."

Amabel blushed. She knew she was fond of it—not of gossiping to *them*, but of hearing *their* tales. Her mother and Sophia had often reproved her for the idling way in which she did her visiting. Lord Latimer saw the blush, and interpreted it rightly. It made him the more resolute in his views, though, loving the ingenuous face which so readily made its confessions, his tones were soft and kind.

“I think you agree with me, my child. Let us, then, consider how it shall be done. I cannot allow you to be seen dawdling about the villages whenever it may take your fancy to go—that would hardly do; but by appointing times when you may be expected, there will be no objection even to visits to the houses. Let us say that every Tuesday morning, weather permitting, at some time from eleven to one o’clock, you shall visit in Pottleford. I will generally walk with you. If I am unable to do

so, the walk is through the grounds, and you will be able to go by yourself."

"I shall not mind going by myself when I have made acquaintance," was Amabel's reply. "But you must come to take care of me at first."

"I will, dearest," he said, with extra warmth and fondness, for this expression of her need of him was bliss. "This will do for Pottleford. You will go first to the school and hear a class, and then visit any person who may require to be visited. There is a distant village, where there is also a school. Every other Thursday, I should say—it will be a proper plan to drive there. You can have luncheon an hour earlier, and start soon after two. I will give orders that it shall be so. Then on Saturday mornings you, with the assistance of Mrs. Hatchford, can attend to the club."

He paused.

"I am sure I shall like it all when I am

able to do it," was the answer given, not only with submission, but with pleasure; and Lord Latimer was more enamoured of his young wife and pupil than ever.

The rules were not quite at an end. He wished also to instruct and amuse—to amuse and instruct—to do it himself. He had a cultivated mind, and a taste naturally pure and good. A little too exclusively high and correct, perhaps, to suit one of Amabel's age; yet it is a good fault, and with care the taste may soon be raised to bear it. But this instruction and amusement were to be laid under rules also. "Do you like me to read to you?" he asked, well knowing what answer would be given.

"Indeed I should," she cried, with even more of grateful warmth than he anticipated.

"It will be a pleasure to me to do it. I will read to you every evening from nine till about half-past ten. Three times a

week we will read poetry ; and the alternate nights we will read prose. You are not fond of history ?”

“ Perhaps I should be if you read it.”

“ I hope you will be—I expect it—indeed, I am sure of it. But we will begin with other things. Some papers from the *Spectator* will be our entertainment for to-night.”



## CHAPTER X.

TO some minds the mere fact of having their day pencilled out for them would make the day joyless—would take from every occupation the power to please. If a certain reading was to begin at a certain hour, that reading would certainly become a source of *ennui*. However great might be the delight in a ride, or a walk, or a visit to the poor, yet if inevitably bound to take such ride or walk when a precise clock struck, the mind and the limbs would alike rebel. More especially this would be the case with minds just emancipated from the school-room, just tasting their first taste since childhood of the blessedness of an unfettered

existence. A little later, fetters are again desired. Men grow weary of "unchartered freedom;" but in early youth freedom is, in reality, all that the wildest poets have said in its praise.

It was not so, however, with Amabel. She had been the most obedient of pupils to a common-place governess; she had bowed like a reed to Dorothy's kindly but inexorable rule. Sincerely anxious at all times of her life, more from instinct than from thought—for she was not a thinker—to do her duty both to God and to man, she accepted the rules laid out for her as helps; feeling her own weakness, she leaned against them as props; and had there been no such helps and props, would most probably have been restless and unhappy.

There was nothing, therefore, like rebellion in her soul—no feeling of bondage in accepting and submitting herself to Lord Latimer's rules. She thought him very wise

and very good, and did her best to conform herself to his will.

The first time that anything like a smart under the laws that bound her was felt, was on the occasion of a drive. It was Autumn, and Lord Latimer had desired her to drive from three to five. At three the carriage stood at the door, and she was expected to enter it; at five she was set down again at her door, and expected to re-enter the house. Now, it never occurred to Lord Latimer that a drive in a barouche—a daily objectless drive—could be a weary thing. Nor, perhaps, was it likely to have occurred to him; for he had seen his mother take her daily drive during many successive years, and he himself took his daily ride with daily satisfaction. Nay, Amabel herself, had she been asked in her old home to imagine great felicity—to picture a great luxury of enjoyment, might have named a daily drive through a pretty country, and with fine well.

driven horses, as one of the dreams of her fancy. Nevertheless, so it was that the daily drive slightly wearied her. She yawned many times, once she fell asleep, and often arrived at home with spirits tired, not freshened, by the fresh air.

This was more especially the case as time went on; for, knowing little of the surrounding country, she submitted herself to the will of her coachman, and he, having found a drive with smooth roads and few hills, carried out his own views by exercising his horses upon it several times a week.

One day—it was the third day that he had taken her the same drive—he drew up for a moment to have a stone knocked from the foot of one of the horses. The footman alighted, and, as he was re-mounting, Amabel ventured to ask if there was any other road by which they could go home.

“Oh! yes, my lady,” said the footman, readily; perhaps he himself was wearied

with the sameness of the afternoon's occupation ; " we can go round, and come in by Pottleford."

"Then I should rather like a change, Dickson," Amabel said, raising her soft voice to address the coachman.

"Yes, my lady," he replied, willing to please his young mistress ; and off they went.

But this route was longer, and there was a hill, and it was near six, and beginning to grow dusk when they arrived at Audricourt. Lord Latimer stood at the door to receive her. He looked grave, but not much more grave than usual ; and Amabel, who had enjoyed herself—partly because the drive was pretty, partly because of the impediment of the steep hill, partly and mostly because she had exercised her will upon it—sprang out cheerfully to meet him.

"You are late, Amabel," he said.

"A little ; but I have had such a pretty drive!"

“I am glad you liked it. But the evenings begin to grow chilly; and I do not wish you to be out—that is, to drive—much after five.”

“It was not cold,” she said. “I did not think it signified. Do you mind? I am very sorry.”

“No, my child,” he said fondly; “nor does it signify. I should not perhaps have noticed it, but that I have been above half an hour waiting for you.”

“I am very sorry,” Amabel said, earnestly.

“Say no more—it is nothing; and I do not think it is chilly to-night. Shall we walk a little way, and get a sprig of myrtle for your hair?”

Nothing could have been kinder; and Amabel felt grateful and pleased. Nevertheless, the daily drives did not become the livelier for the incident. She did not argue about it. She tried most earnestly to be

regular and punctual, but she seldom came home otherwise than tired.

It was the same with the evening's reading. When the clock struck nine, Lord Latimer expected her to rise and get her work ; and in the same moment he arranged his candles to his satisfaction, and opened his book. With the reading itself, Amabel was delighted. Lord Latimer did not read with great animation, but he read correctly, giving the proper meaning to his sentences. When there were difficulties, he would stop, and say a few words in explanation. He began, as has been said, with some papers from the *Spectator* ; and for his poem he chose the " Lay of the Last Minstrel." He argued, " She has been used to very trifling reading at home. I must bring her gradually to enjoy better things. It will be well to begin with the most correct work of a popular author." The choice was good, and the arguing sound ; and Amabel was en-

chanted. So long as this first essay in reading lasted, she longed for the evening's treat, as a hungry child longs for its dinner.

But it was not quite the same when they came to Milton's "Paradise Lost," to Prescott's "Ferdinand and Isabella;" and on Sundays to one of Barrow's sermons.

Lord Latimer, with a cultivated and correct taste, enjoyed the music of a fine style. He might in time have taught Amabel to enjoy it also, but he could not sufficiently put himself in her place to know how to do this; and Barrow's long sermons were one of the things she insensibly dreaded. In a degree it was the same with the other books mentioned. She liked the fine passages of Milton; she became excited in the doings of Ferdinand and Isabella. Often when Lord Latimer looked up he met—and met with a beating heart—the eyes of his young wife riveted upon him as she hung upon his words. But it was not always



thus. Accustomed to dream, she sometimes wandered away from the long reading, then woke to dread that some explanation would be given which would need intelligent remarks. Conscious then that she had been for ten minutes in the clouds, she would stretch her young intellect to gather up the past, and by dint of stretching after what was gone, again lose the present.

This kind of exertion made the reading, even while it pleased, dreaded—made her sometimes long for an evening when there should be no exercise for her powers.

It was about six weeks after her marriage that a kind of insane desire took hold of her that clocks should be forbidden to strike. There were many clocks in the house, striking hours and half hours and quarters; and at first she had been amused to hear them, but by dint of their becoming her masters, they grew to worry her. Yet she was unconscious why it was, so little con-

scious, that she one evening spoke her feelings to Lord Latimer, when the clock struck nine.

“Is there not something the matter with the clock to-night?”

“How so?” he said, looking up at it with surprise.

“It seems to have such a disagreeable sound.”

“I think the sound is the same as usual,” he said drily.

Amabel blushed, and began to work quickly. She felt rebuffed; she felt how foolish he must have thought her, and half wondered what she had really meant.

Lord Latimer saw the stooped head and blushing cheek, and rising up, laid his hand on her head.

“Do not be fanciful, my Amabel,” he said gently. Very far indeed was he from imagining what had given cause to the observation. He simply thought her foolish, and did not wish her to be so.

“You are not angry,” she asked, feeling altogether puzzled as to what had happened.

“No, my child, I do not think I *could* be angry with *you*.”

The words were very sweet to her ears, and the discomfort of the clocks was swept away for the time. There came also a little event to make a change in her regulated life.

One evening she received a letter from her mother. There was an evening-post at Audricourt, and on leaving the dining-room, Lord and Lady Latimer usually found their letters and newspapers. Amabel's letters were not numerous, but two or three times a week she found a letter from some member of her family, and looked to those nights with unspeakable longing. Lord Latimer had laid no embargo on her correspondence. Nor did he ask to see her letters. He was not jealous of her attachment to her home; on the contrary, his justice and good princi-

ples told him it was right a child should love her parents, and he might himself have reproved her had she failed in attention in that respect. She received therefore her letters in peace, and they were often the cause of those wandering thoughts during the reading that followed. While he was engaged, and imagining her to be engaged with Milton and his angels, her mind was probably going over a brother's feats at cricket. She was as little of a boy as any girl had ever been, but she was very fond of her brothers, and distance now invested their occupations with double charms.

Of this home interest Lord Latimer knew nothing. Her home belonged to the past time of her life. It was right and proper that she should remember it, but it had nothing to do with him ; he therefore, by that monomania that possessed him regarding himself, had nothing to do with it. He sometimes said "Is your mother" or "Is

your father quite well?" and so ended his inquiries.

On this evening Amabel had a letter, and he had none. There was also a failure in his usual evening paper. Having glanced, therefore, at one he had already read, he had nothing to do but to watch Amabel; and he never desired any better entertainment.

He saw the interest with which she read her long letter; he saw her twice glance quickly up at him and withdraw her eyes; he saw her three times recur to a particular passage and dwell on it, and after she had folded up her letter fall into a fit of musing.

He waited for a time to see if she would speak, and took up the old newspaper, that she might not suppose he was watching or waiting. He fancied she had a request to make, and, having desired her to make her requests without fear, he wished her to do it.

But the moments slipped by and she did not speak. The clock struck nine, and she gave a visible start, but still made no observation. He thought it was time to interfere; he thought it was a moment in which he might show her the love and care he had for her; for *that*, not the giving pleasure to her, was the thought that presented itself.

“My Amabel,” he said, kindly, “may I read your letter?”

She looked up, delight, gratitude, and terror all expressed in her blushing, speaking face.

“It is very long; you would never like to read it,” she said.

“I have a reason for wishing to read it to-night,” he said, gravely, for he was not setting up a precedent; “but do as you like best. I do not press my wish.”

She rose and gave it to him, and then sat down, with trepidation expressed in all

her movements. The letter contained a variety of home news, simply described. The style might not be very good ; but Mrs. Lee was too wise to write anything to her young daughter which Lord Latimer might not be pleased to see. The sentence that caused Amabel's hesitation and trepidation was this :—

“Jenny” (for so Virginia was called) “has not been well of late—languid and out of sorts. Sophia has offered to have her for two or three weeks at Dover. If she goes, your father will take her, and I suppose they will pass within five or six miles of Audricourt.”

This was all. It might or might not be intended as a hint. Amabel did not consider whether it was so or not ; she was only thinking how she longed to see her father and Virginia, and whether or not she could ask Lord Latimer to invite them. He had told her to make her requests, but then he

had never suggested a visit, and she was not sure that this was not a request too large to make. Amabel was a coward, and as soon as she said in her heart, "Yes, I will ask," her heart seemed to rise into her mouth and choke her.

She now sat waiting. She wondered if Lord Latimer would observe the hint. Like very sweet music, therefore, came the observation,

"We must not let your father go by, my Amabel. You must write and tell him that we hope he will sleep here; and, if your mother could come also, they might stay for a day or two."

"Oh! thank you," she cried, with warmth. "How good!—how very good you are!" She came timidly across and knelt by his side, raising her eyes, beaming with gratitude, to his face.

He was already repaid, and more than repaid, for the effort he had made. This



little overt act on the part of his shy and gentle wife, this incense offered to his merit, was inexpressibly grateful to him; and he not only responded with warmth to her tribute of affection, but he shortly afterwards added a new proof of the perfection of his love.

When she sat down, he stretched out his hand for his book. It was time to begin to read, and it had not occurred to him to postpone the appointed duty. Whilst finding his place, however, he glanced at her again, and saw her eyes turned in the direction of the writing-table. She then looked up at the clock, and finally, as if resigning herself, pulled her work towards her. He made no observation, but began to read. He did not wish to yield to her fancies. It pleased him better to make her a gift of his bounty; when, therefore, he had read two or three pages, he paused.

“It strikes me, Amabel,” he said, “that

if you write to your mother to-night, it will save a post, and give her longer time to make a change in her arrangements, if they should be necessary."

"I think it would. I was thinking so myself. But how good of you to think of it!"

"Then I will read to myself to-night, and you shall write your letter."

"Oh! thank you!" she said, in the tone of one dissolved in gratitude and admiration.

He could read her face; it spoke a truth sweet to him to know, and he was satisfied. Yet the effort was an effort. He had known, of course, that the time must come when he must entertain Mr. and Mrs. Lee, and other members of his own and Amabel's family, but he had not intended it should be yet. He, to that home which had satisfied him for years, had brought a prize that made it a Paradise; wrapt in this new-found

bliss, he never thought it might be less of a Paradise to the young creature who had lived in the noise and bustle of a large family.

The effort, however, was made. Mr. and Mrs. Lee, with Virginia, paid a visit the following week. Mrs. Lee then returned home, and Mr. Lee and the child went on their journey.

Lord Latimer took the opportunity to invite a few guests, and Amabel's parents were entertained by two intensely dull but stately dinners. Neither Lord Latimer nor Amabel was gifted with the gift of conversation, and she was so shy, so overwhelmed with the attention paid her and the honour of her position, that she could hardly dare to open her lips. This, however, was so natural that it pleased. If she could do nothing else, she could, like Harriet Smith in "Emma," "sit and smile, and look pretty," and this she did to perfection ; pleased her-

self with her own exalted position, and pleasing others with her beauty and innocence and grace. It was Lord Latimer that dulled. Every voice lost its natural tone, every step grew afraid of treading in his presence. It seemed as if an invisible feather-bed was enveloping the rooms and pressing down its inhabitants.

Little conscious was Lord Latimer of this. He had wished to pay a proper duty; it was done, and he was satisfied. To him the evenings were evenings of excitement, for his eyes rested on his lovely young wife, and as he watched the grace of her movements, and the exquisite beauty of her colouring, his heart beat with quickened pulsations. Love and pride made him happy; that every guest retired yawning was a circumstance of which he could not be aware.

“How very well Amabel looks!” Mrs. Lee observed to her husband, when they were

alone. She was not quite sure what line she should take ; it depended on the line he took.

“ She does indeed,” he replied ; but his tone of voice was not a perfectly happy one.

“ It is strange that I should always have thought Sophia so much handsomer,” Mrs. Lee began again, still anxious to discover his opinion before she committed herself to a remark. “ I always did till to-night ; now I see that there is no comparison between them. Whether it is her dress, or her jewels, or whatever it is, I don’t know ; but I should say that I had never seen anything in this world so beautiful as Amabel looked to-night.”

“ Yes,” Mr. Lee said, and sighed. “ Poor child !”

She had now discovered the secret opinion he held, and Mrs. Lee decided on taking the opposite line.

“Why poor child? Surely Amabel is not to be pitied?”

“I can’t get over it,” Mr. Lee said, in a sighing voice. “Married to that statue! My dear, I feel so weary this evening, that, delighted as I am to be with the dear child, I am almost wishing to be off at six to-morrow morning. And can she be happy?”

“Only look at her, and you will see.” But Mrs. Lee turned her head away as she spoke to swallow a yawn that, rising from the very depths of her soul, would not be subdued, and which, had it been seen, would have betrayed her entire agreement in the sentiments expressed by her husband. “You must remember that Amabel is not like any of us; she never was. She never would bustle about the house as Sophia did. She was evidently made to be what she is, and I think she will do it admirably. She adores Lord Latimer; and as to him, I don’t know what

word I could use that would express his feeling for her. I watched him all the evening ; he has no thought but of her."

"It is true. Yes, I observed him, and was quite satisfied ; and, as you say, Amabel seems quite happy. Still, how *can* she be happy ?—that is what I ask myself ; and will it last when the poor thing grows older ? Of course it is a great marriage for Amabel, but I wish from my heart it had never been !" And from the depths of his soul there came another yawn, equal to, and even surpassing, that of Mrs. Lee.

"I can't agree with you. Of course things will improve. When Amabel is less shy she will rouse him up, and in time I suppose there will be children about ; and I am sure it is a comfort to feel that the poor child is so well settled, and will be so well cared for. She might have fallen in love with a poor man, and had to rough it, and she is not formed for a rough life. She would have been miserable."

“Perhaps so,” he said, cheering up, for his yawn had done him good. “Certainly if one can get over Lord Latimer’s gravity, there is no other thing to complain of. And as you say, we all have our tastes, and Amabel’s is different from ours. Well, at any rate, it is too late to change, and we must be content.” And he went to bed comforted, and rose up in the morning determined to enjoy his day at Audricourt.

Amabel, excited and happy, scarcely slept from the eagerness with which she planned the sights she should show to her mother the following day. But her wakeful night was a useless waste of planning, for Lord Latimer had settled it all before her. There was not an hour which had not been distributed by his forethought. Not what Amabel pleased to show, but what he pleased she should be pleased to show—not to wander happily and freely with her parents, but to conduct them in a kind of



state to various points. This was what he intended :—Eleven to twelve was devoted to the garden ; twelve to two to the village, the farm, the church, and the immediate neighbourhood of the house. Amabel and her mother drove in a pony-carriage to these various sights, and Mr. Lee and Lord Latimer walked, and met them. At two they returned to luncheon ; and at a quarter before three they drove and rode out, returning home punctually at five. At six, Lord Latimer had the picture-gallery lighted, and offered to show the pictures.

He was fond of pictures. His taste was good and cultivated ; and it was a tranquil and contemplative pleasure that suited his turn of mind. During his lonely years, the arranging of this gallery, the hanging of the pictures, and the subsequent contemplation of a work well done, had been his greatest enjoyment.

Being *his* great pleasure, he naturally sup-

posed it was the same to others—or perhaps did not suppose at all, but followed his own wish without suppositions regarding his guests. At the end of a weary day, therefore, when both were longing to see a little of their daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Lee had to walk up and down a picture-gallery, and listen to comments which were of no interest to them. Mrs. Lee had no taste for art at all—she liked a staring, gaudy portrait quite as well as a Sir Joshua ; and Mr. Lee, who had some taste, was too weary and too much vexed to be able to exercise it.

Both retired to dress, thoroughly worn out, and then took their part anew in an evening of intense dulness.

The next morning early they left ; and so ended their first visit to Audricourt.

Yet it was remarkable that Mr. Lee was the only person who expressed a feeling of disappointment ; and Mr. and Mrs. Lee were the only ones who felt it. Amabel had

been wildly happy—the dull days had been brimful of excitement to her; and Lord Latimer, satisfied with her and with himself, supposed his guests to have been as happy as he intended them to be.

When it was over, Amabel returned to her monotonous and regulated life without dismay or weariness. Gratitude, intense gratitude to her husband, for his thought of her, and his attention to her parents, absorbed her whole innocent soul; and she felt unable to do enough to please him. In his little plan to win her, he had been very successful.

## CHAPTER XI.

I N the month of December, Lord Latimer observed to Amabel,

“I must ask my sisters to come here. You will help me to entertain them.”

“I will indeed,” she said heartily; terrified and gratified at once, but most of all desirous to show him that she was as happy to receive his relations as he had been to receive hers.

“I shall ask them in two divisions,” he continued; “we must have two parties. I will write to-day to invite the two eldest!”

“For Christmas!” Amabel said; not as if making an inquiry, or a suggestion; but saying what she supposed to be in his mind,

and showing her entire agreement with him.

“No,” he replied, with more heat than he often showed in his speech. “I do not like Christmas festivities.”

Amabel felt rebuked and ashamed. She knew not her fault, but blushed deeply. He saw her perplexity, and laid his hand gently on hers.

“Christmas is a religious festival,” he said. “You shall entertain the poor if you will, but you and I will pass our Christmas alone, my Amabel.”

And she blushed again, and smiled; and asked herself what had she done to be so loved by him. Lord Latimer spoke of Christmas as being a religious festival, but that argument had been one sought out by his mind as a reason for dislike, after the dislike to Christmas festivities had grown up. The truth was, he had once paid a visit at Christmas time to one of his sisters, whose

character, warm, unselfish, and joyous, was the very reverse of his own. On that occasion, when a large number of youthful guests were assembled, the Christmas had been certainly boisterous. It was no wonder that the man who loved a grave and quiet life should feel annoyed by the merriment. Many, however, whose tastes were like his own, might have taken pleasure in the contemplation of young and happy life; but Lord Latimer could not approve of anything that was thoroughly distasteful to himself; therefore it was that he considered the subject, and therefore it was that he determined that, as Christmas was a religious festival, mirth was unseemly.

The two parties were made out for the beginning and the end of January, and Lord and Lady Latimer passed their Christmas alone. Amabel's time was occupied, the perfect regularity was broken by the common events of the season, and she enjoyed all

she had to do. There were many charities distributed at the time, and she was allowed to take her part in them. She was also allowed to give two entertainments—one on a large scale to the schools in general, and one on a small scale to some selected and deserving girls and boys.

It is true that nothing could be more dull than the distributions and the feasts. No spirit was allowed to appear; all was grave, methodical, and still. The clergyman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Hatchford, had they been appointed by Lord Latimer himself, which they were not, could not have suited his taste better. Estimable, charitable, grave, methodical, and still, they never offended his prejudices, or startled him by their whims. They were of that class of people (and as there is such a class their tastes must be attended to) for whom long prosy sermons are preached and written; and who, emitting dulness as their breath of life, have

no power to understand the objections to dulness in the mass of men. Under their auspices the feasts and the charities were given and distributed, and under their care Amabel was allowed to take a part in them.

It is true, also, that she was only a spectator. She was not allowed to busy herself in active preparations or active service. This did not suit Lord Latimer's views. But Amabel expected nothing; all she was allowed to do she took as the free bounty and great indulgence of her husband, and instead of cavilling she was grateful. No potter had ever had a clay so malleable to form. Lord Latimer felt it, and was thankful also.

Neither was she one of the many wonderful maidens of this day who can teach, and exhort, and plan, and execute, as by a sort of instinct; the restrictions were not to her what they would have been to others. But



to give was her delight ; she was full of love and kindness ; and perhaps as she sat by, more timid than the most timid child, blushing and smiling at the attentions paid her, the curtseys she received, and the admiring eyes that were fixed on her, she excited as much love as a more active person might have done.

Be it as it may, all began and ended well, and Amabel passed her Christmas happily. Then came the visits of the two elder sisters, and at the latter end of January a visit from the two younger ones.

The same indescribable, inexpressible blankness and dulness characterized both parties. The sisters and their husbands both felt it as much as Mr. and Mrs. Lee had done ; and, though all the sisters sincerely loved their brother, they could not refrain from pity for Amabel. Among themselves nothing was said, but each made a confidence to her husband that Herbert

had got a dear little wife, and they were very glad ; but they wondered what had made her marry him, and they wondered how it would turn out.

The husbands made different answers ; one, a very amiable man, said it could not fail to turn out well.

“It is impossible for a man to live,” he said, “with so sweet, and gentle, and innocent a being without being improved by it ; and Latimer *is* improved.”

And his wife, who was very amiable also, was comforted concerning the dulness of Amabel’s life, and became hopeful for the future. This was the youngest sister, Cecilia.

Another—not an unamiable man, but one who saw extremely clearly the faults of his fellow-creatures, and those of his own relations in particular, took a different view.

“You say you are glad he has such a dear little wife,” he said, curling his lip. “For

my part, I never was so disappointed in anybody as in Lady Latimer."

"Indeed!" was the surprised answer.

"Yes. My trust has always been that Latimer would marry a vixen. It was the only hope for him. Now he is done for!"

"How do you mean, done for?" said his wife, who did not mind expressing herself about her brother, but could never bear to hear her husband attack him.

"Latimer is not a bad fellow, as God made him," he replied, coolly; "but he has managed to make himself one of the most odious beings on this earth. A wife with a mind and a tongue and a temper might have saved him, even yet; but if he is to be set up and worshipped by that little beauty, I defy any power to save him. Better be a villain out and out than such a man."

As he spoke with more warmth than was

needful, or than his wife approved, the conversation came to an end.

A third husband was a "Mr. Croaker," and the sentiment, if not the words, of Croaker in Goldsmith's play was always in his mouth.

"God send we be no worse off this day three months!"

His wife, who was accustomed to his tone of mind, took no notice of the observation when made in her presence, and having delivered herself of her opinion, said no more; but another brother-in-law, hearing him shake his head and make the same observation, when they were discoursing on the same subject, remarked,

"I see you agree with me. I cannot, I confess, look to the future without fear."

Now Mr. Croaker (not that that was his name) had had no particular fears. He always anticipated vague ills, but was ever blind to definite subjects of anxiety. In

great haste he therefore asked what was feared.

“For the poor girl, of course,” was the reply. “When the infatuation—for it can have been nothing else which made her marry Latimer—is over; when she wakes out of her dream, what can be expected for her? Young, soft-hearted, and beautiful, it seems impossible she should escape unhurt. I am sorry for Latimer—he seems really attached to her; but I am more sorry for the poor thing who has sacrificed herself to him at seventeen. What a life of misery is in store for her!”

The Croaker now assumed the office of defender and comforter. Vague ills were his delight, definite ones he could not bear, and his brother-in-law soon found he had anything but agreement to expect from him. Though the views differed, the whole eight persons, however, agreed, had they exchanged opinions, in their impressions con-

cerning the life at Audricourt. All felt that its monotonous dulness was beyond the power of anyone, except Lord Latimer himself, to bear.

Yet the weeks flowed on, and Amabel still bore it without apparent impatience. Human beings can be easily wrought into this state of mechanism; in early youth it is less easy than later in life, yet with timid and indolent natures it is quite possible, even as early as seventeen. In this mechanical state the powers of mind and the feelings, passions, and affections, for a time live on; gradually slumber steals over them—but it is very gradually, and it takes years of slumber to produce death. It is to death, however, that the mechanical life tends. It was the danger of convents, where no active service was required; it is the danger of all solitary lives. Death to the mental powers; death to warm and unselfish affections. Not death, perhaps, to the passions of human

nature; they may sleep, but if they are wakened, they wake the stronger for their sleep.

There was no need to think of such fatal results with Amabel; yet, though her intense gratitude to Lord Latimer kept her unselfish feelings warm and quick, and though his cultivation of her mind prevented the actual slumber of the intellect, true it was that a certain torpor was creeping over her. She was too timid to talk to him of the books they read; she listened to his observations and instructions, but they were often beyond her, instead of quickening the brain. There was no drawing out of her mind, no give-and-take; and the result was, as has been said, a certain torpor. Instead of being worried by the clocks, she began to watch for their striking to mark her day; instead of wishing for variety, she resigned herself placidly to be borne along like a machine. She thus became daily more and more per-

fect in her husband's adoring eyes. Her life was for him and in him ; she was as much a part of himself as any limb of his body. He directed all, and no opposition was made.

In advanced life the danger is that there will never be a wakening up of the powers ; in early life there is a danger also, but it is that whenever the re-action takes place—and that there will be one is almost certain—that it will be overwhelming. There was one in store for both Lord and Lady Latimer.



## CHAPTER XII.

LORD LATIMER'S sister Cecilia was fonder of her brother than were his other sisters. He had tyrannized over her in her youth, and she had been, and still was, afraid of him; but she knew his good qualities better, or, at least, had more trust in them than the rest, and her awe of him was of a more genial kind.

When she came to Audricourt, she had a request to make. Her husband had a brother, whose profession was diplomacy. He had been for some time employed, but in a northern climate, and his health was suffering from it. He fancied that he was passed

over, and she wished Lord Latimer to speak for him.

She asked with much trepidation, and against the advice of her sisters; but found, as indeed she had done before, that Lord Latimer was no bear. He saw little of the wishes of others, and even if he saw, took little heed, solely because he was pre-occupied with himself. But if forced to see, he was as other men. Perhaps his justice made him indeed kinder in action than many more amiable men.

He listened to her, and acceded to her request—so far acceded, at least, as to say that he would see the young man, and if he approved of him, would endeavour to get something done.

Lord Latimer had no great interest, but he, with a large property, and tolerably obedient tenantry, was a firm supporter of his party, and he felt he had a right to make his requests as others have. As far as

his power extended, therefore, he promised to exert it. Meanwhile, he begged that Eustace Hardinge might pay a visit at Audricourt.

Eustace Hardinge was still abroad, but was expecting leave of absence. His sister-in-law undertook for him that he would willingly present himself to Lord Latimer.

This did not happen till the end of April. Before that time Lord Latimer had told Amabel that he intended to take her to London in May, to be presented; and after that was over, to take her a tour abroad.

Amabel's heart beat at both prospects—with ecstasy at the second hope, with awe at the first. She was young and simple, and the thought of standing face to face with a sovereign, much more to be embraced by a sovereign, was a thought of rapture, tempered with fear. Almost her first reflection was, "*What* would Dorothy say?" But it

was a suppressed, not a spoken reflection. All such thoughts lived in her heart's recesses—they never came forth.

Lord Latimer's heart beat also with pulses quicker than was its wont. He had arranged the plans for the year, according to his own taste, and he looked forward to the gratifications he had provided. To show his lovely young prize for one single moment to the world was not unwelcome; but much more welcome was it to think of conducting her, his docile pupil, through foreign scenes, to teach her eye to see as he saw, and to enjoy what he enjoyed.

These plans had been announced about a week before Mr. Hardinge's arrival, and the announcement had stirred Amabel out of the torpor into which she has been represented as having fallen. Her gratitude was warmly expressed; and though she did not dare to question Lord Latimer respecting a thousand small things she wished to know,

she asked some larger questions, and he heard her with complacency, and explained with delight.

It was at this moment of stir that Eustace Hardinge arrived. He was not a remarkable young man in any way, nor reached a high standard in any point, but he was what almost all people would have called "very pleasing." Pleasing in looks, pleasing in manner; amiable in character, and intelligent.

He came only for two nights—that is, his intention was to remain only two nights; but an accident changed his intentions.

The day after his arrival Lord Latimer drove him to see some sight of the neighbourhood, and as they returned the carriage was upset. The horses shied, and Lord Latimer, though a tolerably good driver, was startled, and for a second lost his hold on them. They grew restive, and in pran-

cing, dashed the carriage against a post. It was on Eustace Hardinge's side that the shock came, and he was thrown out. Lord Latimer was moved from his seat, but recovered himself, and by a violent effort recovered his hold upon the horses also, and no further harm happened. The groom had dismounted before the accident took place, and Eustace was the sole sufferer. He was stunned, and on recovering himself was in great pain; but after some assistance, and some brandy procured from a neighbouring house, he said he was well able to go home, and was driven home by Lord Latimer accordingly.

On reaching home, however, he was obliged to go to bed. He had received several contusions, and was in great pain; and on the arrival of the physician, was ordered to remain in bed for some days. It would be difficult to describe the feelings of Lord Latimer on the occasion. He had

never to his knowledge done an injury to any human being before. That self which so absorbed him had made it a point to itself that it should always act justly to all men; and unconscious of the many feelings he *had* crushed and wounded, it was one of his well-grounded subjects of consolatory reflection, to consider that he had acted up to his intentions, and had never hurt a human creature. This was an injury perfectly involuntarily given, but the sense of it tortured him. He could hardly rest under the burden of it; and as he expressed little or nothing of what he felt, it tortured the more.

This may seem curious in a selfish man, but Lord Latimer was selfish in his own fashion, not in the fashion of other people. His was the rooted selfishness of self-contemplation, not the selfishness which is born in some cold hearts.

He could not do enough for Eustace.

During the five days that he was confined to bed he visited him unceasingly ; carrying no great cheerfulness to the sufferer, but doing all that lay in his power to relieve him and himself.

On the sixth day Eustace was allowed to get up, and on the seventh he was placed in the drawing-room. Lord Latimer then gave him in charge to Amabel, with a request that she would entertain him to the best of her power. She had not been allowed to visit him, though she felt very sorry for him ; but she was shy and timid. The first night of their acquaintance, when she had heard him talk of all parts of Europe as if he was a citizen of every city, and acquainted with the wonders of art and science in each, she had looked on him with awe and wonder, and very little acquaintance had been made. On this first day also she felt shy and dull. Her poor simple mind seemed to have no



points of contact with this (to her imagination) brilliant young man.

Perhaps he, too, felt some weariness in being compelled to talk to a young lady who, however beautiful, was little of a companion; and at the close of the hours they spent together, he asked if she would read to him on the morrow. His head, he said, was not yet right; if he attempted to read himself, it swam round. He should be very grateful if she would read!

Amabel told Lord Latimer of the request, and asked what she should read. He approved of it, provided Dr. Sutton did not object; and chose for her "The Lady of the Lake."

"It is the work of a popular author," he said, "and perfectly fit for you to read aloud. If he does not wish to have poetry, I will make another selection."

When the physician who had attended Eustace came the following morning, Lord

Latimer inquired if the brain was in a fit state to bear this reading.

Dr. Sutton had attended the Latimer family for many years, and on hearing what was in contemplation, he paused and slightly raised his eyebrows.

"You do not think it safe?" Lord Latimer observed.

"It will do the brain no injury," he replied, laying a just perceptible emphasis on the noun.

Lord Latimer thanked him, and asked no more. He was not a man to observe, nor was he a man to be jealous. If his trust had not been complete in Amabel, it was complete in himself. Jealousy did not, hardly could occur to him.

For nearly a week Amabel became the reader to the invalid. It was now May, and the May of books, more than of our common experience. The sofa of Eustace was wheeled to the window which opened

into the garden, and Amabel sat in the window and read and talked to him. For there was as much conversation as there was reading, and perhaps more.

Over the reading Amabel's heart came out, and her tongue was loosed ; she who had no small talk belonging to the world and its men and its affairs—no talk, because she knew nothing of them—could speak of that in which she had acquaintance, the world of poetry and romance.

The taste of Eustace was like her own—less strong, less inborn, but more cultivated. From taste and fancy he had read many of the old books which she had read by chance in her father's library ; and they stood as they talked on the same ground.

For the first time in her life Amabel had found sympathy. His knowledge inspired *her* with wonder and delight ; her fresh and innocent enthusiasm charmed *him*. And so the hours flew by in mutual pleasure.

When Eustace was permitted to come downstairs, his physician had told him that he might travel in a week. No more was said on the subject, but on the evening of the sixth day, one day before the appointed week was out, Eustace, when he wished his host and hostess good night, said he intended to go on the following day.

“I can put my foot to the ground almost without pain,” he said, “and therefore am fully able to travel.”

Lord Latimer was surprised, and Amabel equally so. Lord Latimer remonstrated. He thought it unwise. Had he Dr. Sutton’s permission?

Dr. Sutton had not called that day, but Eustace said he was certain he was able to go without harm; he had trespassed long, and his mother was expecting him, and he thought it best to go.

“I must not have you harm yourself,” Lord Latimer said, gravely. “I will send

and desire Dr. Sutton to call early. If he permits you to go, I have no more to say."

He had no wish to keep Eustace, but he had a real anxiety that the injury he had received by his means should be thoroughly cured. And so the matter rested.

After breakfast the following morning, Dr. Sutton not having yet called, Amabel and Eustace were left alone in the drawing-room. She had had no opportunity to speak of his departure, and she now spoke frankly.

"I am very sorry you are going," she said, as she sat in the window with her work-bag. "You will come again, I hope?"

He was seated on the sofa opposite to her. He replied, not very clearly, that his mother wished to have him.

The answer was not quite what Amabel expected or hoped, and she said,

"Now that you are well, you find it dull, I am afraid."

She laughed as she spoke. She had become very friendly, very happy with him, and spoke with an ease and grace which a week before would have seemed impossible to her.

"You cannot think it," he replied. There was constraint in his voice, and there was a flush on his cheek.

Amabel was not attending to him. Having said the word dull, her mind suddenly became enlightened to the fact that Audricourt was perhaps dull. She went on, musingly,

"Perhaps it *is* dull here. I have not thought much about it till now, but when I hear you talk of the world, and all the wonderful things of the world, I think it must be so. But we are going abroad, and I shall see some of those wonderful things; and when we come back, I will try to

make Audricourt less tedious; and then perhaps you will come again—will you?" She looked up very invitingly as she ended.

His face was still flushed, and he did not speak.

"You are afraid to promise," and she smiled, little conscious how she was torturing him.

"Yes, I am," he said laconically, but hurriedly.

"But why?" She looked curiously at him, and met a gaze that suddenly she understood. With the swiftness of lightning that gleam of light broke in upon her, and changed her. She dropped her eyes, and her cheek became crimson.

Eustace, after one or two seconds, rose from where he sat, and murmuring, "Forgive me, I am not quite myself," passed her, and left the room.

Amabel sat on, her heart heaving and beating with strange feelings—feelings she

did not in any way understand. She did not struggle with them, because she was unconscious what was possessing her. She hoped, she feared that he would return again, and sat in a state of expectation that made her heart beat faster and faster.

He did not come, and after a time she walked to the door, and then to another window, and so back again to her seat. As she moved about, she passed a long looking-glass, and she paused and gave a glance. Never before had anything but the most childish and innocent pleasure in her fair form fluttered her imagination; but now the thought that swept through her brain made her cheek scarlet again. It was a thought of Eustace, of wonder whether he thought her beautiful, of delight if he did so.

“Of how small spot pure white complains. Alas!  
How little poison cracks a crystal glass.”

She hurried back to her place, her heart beating faster and faster, and sat down, and



caught at her work. The door opened—she thought it was Eustace, and her very self whirled round; but it was Lord Latimer, and she became as suddenly still. She rose up in some confusion.

“Is not Mr. Hardinge here?” he said.

“No—he went some time ago.”

Lord Latimer turned to the bell, and rang it. As he did so, he said,

“Doctor Sutton is here—he thinks his travelling to-day unwise.”

Amabel’s heart gave a jump of pleasure, and a glow came to her cheek. She sat down without replying. She meant to say, she wished to say, “Then I hope he will not do it,” but something, she knew not what, made her afraid.

Lord Latimer stood at the door till the servant appeared, and then asked,

“Where is Mr. Hardinge?”

“He is in his room, my lord; and Doctor Sutton is with him.”

Lord Latimer left the room, leaving the door open, and stood outside in a kind of corridor, which occupied a large part of the house.

Eustace Hardinge, as has been said, was not remarkable in any way ; not *remarkable* among other things for a high standard of religious principle. Nevertheless, he had good principles, so far as they went. High honourable principles and feelings. High religious principle might have prevented even the intrusion of such a thought as loving his neighbour's wife—this Eustace had not. To that strict standard his thoughts were not subdued. But he had very honourable feelings and principles, and he had fought for the last day or two with a temptation, as a saint would have done.

He had begun by thinking Amabel beautiful, but dull ; and he was a worshipper of intellect, and plumed himself on that worship. This it was that had thrown him off

his guard. He was not prepared for the charm of that companionship into which he was so helplessly thrown, and his heart went from him before he was aware. When he found himself uneasy in her presence and pining in her absence, he felt ashamed and dismayed; he resolved, and kept his resolve, that no sign of the feeling she awakened should escape him. The last day he passed with her was, however, one of such stern self-restraint that he felt unable to endure it longer; hence his announcement that he must go.

Had it not been for Amabel's own self, he would possibly have kept his resolve to the end. Very conscious of Lord Latimer's defects, and, without conceit, a little conscious of his own power to please, his dread had been lest, by the smallest exhibition of what he felt, he should render his innocent hostess unhappy. Her frank questioning threw him off his guard. It seemed to say

there could be no fear for her. By one look, therefore, he relaxed his restraint and made his confession. It was, however, but for a moment. When he saw her face of wakening consciousness, his terror returned, and, with his dread, his resolution.

When, therefore, Dr. Sutton, observing his pale looks, shook his head, and said he feared more rest was required, Eustace cut him short. Very imperiously he said he had reasons for going, and should go, whether it hurt him or not. Dr. Sutton made no further reply. He guessed how it was with him.

As he left the house, he passed Lord Latimer, who was awaiting him in the corridor.

“I think Mr. Hardinge may travel,” Dr. Sutton said, as he passed. “It might have been better to be quiet for a day or two longer; but, as it seems he is anxious to visit his mother, it may be done, I think, without

injury. I have advised him how to manage during the journey."

The door was open, and Amabel heard the opinion. He was to go then, and a blank seemed to spread out in vista before her.

In a moment Lord Latimer appeared at the door, and said,

"Dr. Sutton thinks he may go; and he will go as soon as the chaise comes round. When he returns here, tell him I shall be in my library. I have business there."

Amabel sat down again to wait; and again an excitement was stirred up that chased away the power of thought. She waited—nothing else, starting at every step, and her cheek flushing at every start.

She did not wait long. He came in; walking slowly, owing to the injuries he had received, and said,

"I am come to wish you good-bye."

She rose up and went to meet him. Her

cheeks were crimson, and she hardly dared to raise her eyes to his.

"Lord Latimer is in the library," was all she could force out.

"I will go to him." He held out his hand, and she gave hers. As he held it, he said, in an unsteady voice, "I ought to thank you for all your kindness to me, but I am not able to do it. God bless you!" and he turned away and left her.

Amabel stood for a moment, her breast heaving with emotion, then flew up to her own room, which looked out to the front of the house, and placed herself at the window.

"Of how small spots pure white complains! Alas!  
How little poison cracks a crystal glass!"

There she stood to watch him go. She saw him and Lord Latimer leave the house together; she saw him slowly go down a flight of broad steps, then, assisted by the

servants, enter the chaise and drive away. As he drove away, she turned from the window, and burst into a passion of tears.

## CHAPTER XIII.

A MABEL wept violently for a few moments; but these passionate tears brought her to herself. She stopped as suddenly as she had begun, looked round, and asked herself what it was—what had happened?

As consciousness dawned—as she recalled the events of the morning—as she came to the knowledge that it was a guest of her husband's at whose departure she wept so bitterly, terror and shame laid hold on her. She looked about her with wild eyes; tried to recover her scattered senses, and to find out *what* it was that troubled



her—what it was that, in that moment when he drove away, made her life look so dull and dreary. Suddenly Sophia's words came to her remembrance—

“You will have people admiring you. You must watch and take care of yourself.”

Was it that, then? She clutched hold of the sofa on which she sat, as if at a protector, at the thought. Did some one love her?—and she—was she in danger of loving some other person, and not her husband? Did she already do so? Another, and not the husband she had sworn to love and obey! Terror and agony seized her soul. Her excited fears magnified every sensation in which she had that morning indulged, and she trembled at herself as at a guilty thing. What was she to do? Who would save her?

A young Roman Catholic, in such an emergency, would have probably flown to her confessor. Whether in the awful relations

of husband and wife such a refuge is wise, is not here the place to discuss. Amabel had no such confessor or adviser. Except to Dorothy, she had never poured out into any sympathising ear her childish troubles. A dreamy nature lives alone till it finds sympathy ; and she had lived alone.

A woman of firm mind and ardent religious feeling would have betaken herself to One ever ready to hear, and in confession and prayer to Him would have found the guidance she needed, and the strength to fight and overcome. But Amabel, though well taught, and naturally religious, had not learnt to make religion the home of her heart, the refuge in her troubles. With a little thought she might have come to make it so at that moment. But she was casting about for more tangible help ; she felt like one being drawn down and swallowed into an abyss, and she wanted to clasp a hand which could protect and save her.

In a moment almost her resolve was taken. She had chosen her protector, and to him she would go. Against him she had offended, and to him she would confess her offence. He had vowed to help and cherish her, and to him she would fly for the help she needed.

And she went. She knocked at his door and entered. He was writing, and having said "Come in," continued to write without looking up.

"I am come to you to help me!" she said, standing by his side.

He raised his eyes, and startled by something unwonted in her voice, fixed them on her. Her appearance startled him still more. She had had no care to smoothe her hair, or bathe her eyes, but stood in her agitation before him. A vague sharp shoot of fear passed over him, but was not realised.

"What is it, my child?" he said gently. He had told her to come to him in all her

troubles ; he wished to be her sole friend, her all in all, and his voice was tender and inviting.

The tenderness overcame her ; it added to her shame, her terror, her self-reproach, and she burst again into passionate tears. Again there came a shoot of fear, and again he implored her to speak. He held out his hand, but she would not take it ; she threw herself on her knees by his side, and buried her face on his knee.

“I am come to you because I am frightened at myself. I have no one to help me but you, and you must save me. Save me from myself, I am so guilty, so guilty !”

If she could have seen his face she would have been stilled ; her thoughts passing in one moment from herself to him. It was like a sudden stroke, paralysing all that was living in his features. But her head was bowed in shame, and she thought not of him, save as the offended one.

No name had been named, no tale had been told, but Lord Latimer understood as if the tale of every thought and feeling had been written in burning letters before his eyes. He saw that the guest of a few days had come like the strong man to his house, and taken from him all his goods; his one good, his treasure; that only thing which had wakened up his heart.

There was a pause; and then, although no name had been named, no tale told, he said,

“One thing I must ask. Did Mr. Hardinge—” he paused, the words could not be brought forth. Again he began, and added, “dare,” and that word was fierce; and again he paused, unable to speak more.

“No, no,” Amabel cried, with a passion that astonished him. “He did not. He would not. It is I myself that I am frightened at—not at him.”

Again there was a pause; and then he

said, and this time there was an accent of intense mournfulness in his voice,

“Were *you* only in fault, then, Amabel?”

She made no reply.

“Speak,” he said hoarsely. “I must know all now.”

“He said nothing,” she replied obediently, “but I think it was why he went. I saw, and I was glad.” There came over her a remembrance of her feelings during the morning, and kneeling there by her husband’s side, they seemed so horrible that she shuddered. “Do not think I would ever see him again,” she cried; “I would not, for worlds! I never thought, I never knew, and now I know I come to you to save me. Oh! forgive me, forgive me, for I am very miserable!”

Every word was like sharp steel. So easily moved, so easily won from him; no safety, as it seemed, but in shutting the intruder out from her life. Amabel little knew

the force of the words she used, or the interpretation he put on them. He spoke at last.

“Compose yourself, Amabel,” he said, and he forced her to rise. “I forgive. You have done what you could. But leave me now. Go and rest and compose yourself; I will consider what is best to be done. We will meet at luncheon.”

That he could speak steadily and calmly was perhaps much, but his voice had lost its tenderness. It was a voice, nothing more. Not stern, not angry, but cold. There was no feeling in it.

The change was so great that Amabel felt it. While that tender voice was in her ears, she had not dared to raise her eyes, but now she looked in his face. Its expression awed her; so pale, so fixed. She could not understand it then; she thought it was anger, and, awed and ashamed, she softly obeyed and stole away. When she was gone he rose and locked the door, and remained alone with his misery.

## CHAPTER XIV.

IT was not much past twelve o'clock, and there was a long morning. During that long morning, Amabel sat waiting for luncheon-time, longing for and dreading the moment when she should see Lord Latimer again. It was a singular fact, supposing her feelings to have been what she thought they had been, that the image of Eustace was, during this time, scarcely presented to her mind—was only so presented as being the cause of the strange misery that had come upon her. The current of her thought all centred on Lord Latimer: how he would look when she saw him again?—whether his anger would be more than she could bear?



She went down at the proper hour, and began to eat with the punctuality that pleased him; and, after a few minutes waiting, he came in. He did not eat luncheon, but he generally sat with her during the time; and he sat down on this day, as was his wont. But there was that same fixed look in his face; and when he made an observation, there was the same dull sound in his voice; and Amabel bowed in shame and sorrow before it. She did not understand—she thought he could not forgive, and she wondered what would become of her.

As a little frightened child, too much frightened to cry, sits choking over its dinner, with large tears coursing down its cheeks, so sat Amabel; and faster and faster, though still silently, they flowed, as the silent luncheon went on.\* Lord Latimer saw the tears, and could not bear the sight. He said, "They are for *his* departure;" and

he rose up suddenly, and moved away. As he was leaving the room, a servant said the carriage had not been ordered. He turned back and asked,

“Will you drive to-day, Amabel?”

The very question was a change—he usually said, “You *will* drive.” And Amabel’s tears redoubled while she timidly replied,

“Shall I drive?”

“I think you had better—at the usual time. I will meet you at the door.” And he left her to herself.

She hurried down at the time appointed, and found him standing at the door. With more care than usual he assisted her to get in and arrange herself, covering her with her rug; but he did not address her. It was a gusty afternoon, and before she drove off, he desired the coachman to avoid some particularly dusty road. “It will rain to-night,” he then said, looking round. This

was all that passed between them ; and they parted.

When Amabel returned from her drive, the head-servant followed her into the drawing-room, and said Lord Latimer had desired him to tell her that he was gone to London.

“Gone !” Amabel cried, almost with a shriek.

“Yes, my lady. He went about half an hour ago. He desired me to say that you would find a letter in your dressing-room.”

Amabel flew away like a dart of lightning, and the perplexed servant looked after her. He had thought there had been some disagreement—he had speculated on the cause. The thoughts he had had were all put to flight.

On her blotting-book, Amabel found a letter, and tore it open. It contained only these few lines :—

“I have business in London, and I thought

it best to go at once. I will then consider the relations which must in future exist between us. You shall hear from me from thence. Compose yourself, and take care of your health—so you will best please me.

“LATIMER.”

There were the traces of a beginning smeared lightly off above these lines—a faint shadow of a “My.” And so it was—Lord Latimer was about to write “My Amabel,” as on one or two occasions when he had written her a hasty note, had been his custom; but as he wrote it, the bitter thought arose, “She is no longer mine;” and it was effaced, and cold and calm the lines began and ended.

There was a momentary feeling of desperation in Amabel’s mind. He could not forgive her, that was plain. What was to become of her? The next instant another thought banished every trace of penitence or

despair from her mind. Was she to be left in that large house alone? Already, though the daylight was shining in, the shadow of bodily and mental terror crept over her, and she looked around her in agony.

While sitting fixed in these comfortless thoughts, the servant came to tell her that Mr. Hatchford was in the drawing-room. She went down with thankfulness. So dreary, so desolate she felt, the visit of the kind, prosy old man was like the visit of an angel.

"I had a note from Lord Latimer," he said, "to tell me of his departure, and to beg me to see you, Lady Latimer, and offer you my services, should you want any assistance during his absence."

A tear fell from Amabel's eye. It was at her husband's thought for her; a tear of remorse and gratitude.

"We must all part at times," said Mr. Hatchford, cheerfully, seeing the tear and

interpreting it; "and perhaps it is as well, for these small partings help to make us ready for the great parting that must come."

As commonplace people often do, Mr. Hatchford gave utterance to a poetical thought that has been very poetically expressed; but Amabel's mind was too strangely pre-occupied to admit of any kind of moralizing. She assented with her gentle "Yes," without knowing to what she assented.

He was touched with her look of dejection, and he tried again—

"To-morrow is your day for driving to the hills, I think, Lady Latimer?"

"Is it?" Amabel asked, startled by the question. For a week her routine life had been intermitted, and now that old life looked to her like some far-off thing—a hardly-remembered time.

"Thursday afternoon, surely," he said,

extremely surprised at her forgetfulness. "I was going to observe that the drive would do you good. I and my wife will drive that way also, and meet you, if you please."

"Thank you, I should like it very much," Amabel said, catching at the least offer of human companionship. "And, as I did not go yesterday to the school, I think I will go there in the morning. Shall I?" for, unable to stand by herself, she pathetically appealed to any help that came near her.

He assented warmly, and promised to fetch her, and left her in some degree soothed. If she could get over this night, the next day was provided for.

But the evening was very dreary. It rained, and the dusk came on early and filled the rooms with black shadows; and, later in the evening, the wind howled and the rain pattered, and vague, shapeless terrors so occupied Amabel's mind that they left no room for other thought, until she

threw herself on her knees at night. Then the thought of her sins which had brought all this misery came over her, and she burst into tears, and asked for forgiveness—not of Lord Latimer—and for help to do her duty to him, and to him only in the future. And, for the first time in her life, the real sense of the protection of God stole into her breast.

Calmed with the thought, and wearied with overmuch feeling, she went to bed, slept soundly, and woke comforted.

Yet there were many alternations of mood before the two long days and three nights during which she awaited Lord Latimer's letter had passed. Had he had the least power of putting himself in another's place, he would not have left the poor young thing to whom he was sincerely desirous to do his duty so un comforted. But the thought of her desolation in that large house never so much as entered his imagination.



He had to consider what was best, and he did consider, and thought not of her suspense. It must be owned, however, in his excuse, that he looked upon her as otherwise pre-occupied; he could not in the least imagine the state of her mind. He wished to be just to her; to feel for her was beyond his power.

On the third morning Amabel received a letter, and sat like one turned to stone. If he had no power of entering into her feelings, she certainly had not entered into his. His letter was long; it began, as did his note, without a beginning.

“ Clarendon Hotel, May 10th.

“ You will not have been surprised at my delay in writing to you. It required time to consider how, in the altered relations between us, our life was to proceed.

“ I have to thank you for the confidence you placed in me. It shall not be abused,

and I will endeavour to deserve it ; and believe me, however in other ways it may alter my feelings towards you, it will fortify my trust, and secure my respect.

“ At the same time, it would be useless to deny that a change has come, and a change that entails other changes. I will endeavour to help you, and to shield you from the evil consequences that might follow you ; but the tie that bound us is broken ; a new way of life is necessary, and we must look in the face the emergency with which we have to deal.

“ I will tell you as shortly as I can the arrangements I have made. They will, I hope, satisfy you.

“ On my arrival in London, I heard of the illness and distress of a person with whom I am slightly acquainted. He is the father of the only friend I ever had, a young man who died at college ; and, owing to some circumstances connected with that

time, I thought it right to visit him. I found that he had been ordered abroad for a year, but that there were difficulties—caused by his disease, which is nervous—in making proper arrangements. It appeared to me that I could not do better than offer myself to accompany him. I am not needed as a companion ; but I have offered to reside where he resides, that I may communicate with his physicians if needful. The offer was accepted, and we shall leave England for Geneva in a few days. Thence we proceed to Florence. I have thus secured a simple and natural object to account for our separation. It is useless to look beyond the present moment. In time we may have learned to control our feelings, and our lives, if they must be united, may begin under new auspices.

“With regard to yourself, I think you cannot do better than to remain at Audricourt. My leaving you there as my sole

representative, my correspondence with you on necessary business, will avert suspicion, and will secure to you all that consideration and respect which is your due. I need not, I imagine, suggest to you the necessity of *silence*. It is due to yourself, no less than to me—due to your position now, and to our future life—that what has passed should be buried in oblivion. From the confidence you reposed in me, I am unable to doubt that your wish is to conquer your affection. It is difficult to offer advice, yet I should suggest that employment and occupation in that home in which, unfortunately, your destiny is fixed, will be the best method to assist you in obtaining the victory.

“Yet I do not enforce solitude. It certainly appears to me advisable, under present circumstances, that you should remain at home and in quiet; but I am far from forbidding visits from your own family. I would, on the contrary, suggest

that, if it be according to Mr. and Mrs. Lee's plans, your youngest sister and her governess should pass a considerable portion of the time of my absence with you. I will write to them on the subject, making my own explanation of the cause of my leaving you for so long a time.

"I have hope that these arrangements will satisfy you. I beg you to answer me freely and at once, and at all times to continue to make known your wishes. Once a week I shall expect to hear from you concerning the state of affairs at Audricourt. My steward will communicate with you. In conclusion, I can only wish you peace.

"LATIMER."

"P.S.—I ought perhaps to add that no feeling of resentment has prevented me from performing my promise to my sister Cecilia. I have made the application I was requested to make for Mr. Hardinge, and I have reason to believe that my request will im-

mediately make a change in his circumstances. He will probably have to leave England very shortly."

Had Lord Latimer been present during the reading of this letter, had he seen the apathetic indifference with which Amabel's eyes wandered over the last paragraph, he might have obtained some insight into the state of her mind.

Could Amabel herself have speculated on and observed her own self, light also might have dawned on her. But human beings in strong emotion do not speculate on themselves, nor do they notice the strange inconsistencies of feeling to which, in many cases, they are liable. That one horrible moment when Amabel had felt guilty was vividly present to her imagination; she remembered the agitation of her heart when she read the confession of Eustace in his face—that guilty gaze on her own beauty—that sense

of blankness and desolation when she saw him drive away—another, and not her husband. All this she remembered, and even yet her cheeks were crimson at the thought ; but she did not know that with a violence unknown before her thoughts had returned to Lord Latimer—that since she had looked in *his* face, and seen that which she supposed to be anger, her thoughts had never once wandered from him. Nothing of this did she observe. She knew that she had been guilty, though but for a few moments, of taking pleasure in the admiration of another, and not her husband ; and that guilt remained on her soul an indelible fact. She supposed it to be there still, and was humbled to the dust.

The first effect of Lord Latimer's letter was to turn her, as has been said, to stone. That what she had done should have consequences such as these appalled her. That life was over, that she and her husband

were to part—that Lord Latimer was driven by her into a foreign land, away from his home—it seemed too horrible to be true, and she sat staring and looking at the letter, as if unable to understand.

Then she read it again, and again, and again, every time pausing at the sentence, “I wish you peace,” till at length, by force of reading, something of reality came ; she began to feel, and at the fourth reading she dropped the letter and burst into tears.

She was weeping violently when her maid, who had brought her her letter before she was dressed, knocked at the door. That knock recalled Amabel to thoughts of life. She hurriedly said she was not ready, and then recurred to her letter, and began to consider what was to be done. With a power of thought for which no one could have given her credit, of which she would have supposed herself incapable, she began to consider what she should say ; how she should



behave ; how meet Lord Latimer's wishes to the best of her ability. "It was due to him that what had passed should be buried in oblivion." She dwelt upon the subject, asking herself what had passed ; and like a bad dream the whole of that day, that day stamped as with red-hot iron on her memory, came back to her, and crimsoned her cheek anew with shame and horror. She buried her face in her hands, and then flung herself weeping upon her knees, asking for pardon for the past, and help to redeem it in the future. Then more calmly she rose up and made her plan. She rang for her maid and said,

"Lord Latimer is going away ; he is obliged to go abroad. I don't think I can go down to breakfast this morning. Will you bring some up here ?"

Her eyes were tearful ; her voice was tremulous. The maid looked pityingly at her young mistress and departed. Departed with her news. The servants were perplex-

ed. They had been convinced from the first that something was the matter; but what, they could not imagine. Their first thought Amabel's distress at her husband's departure seemed to put to flight. And her manner afterwards banished it still further.

When she came down, sad, dejected, but composed, and, with a quiet dignity in her ways, asked a few questions about the house, showing herself for the first time to be the mistress of it, they felt more than ever perplexed, but more than ever ashamed of their suspicion that the handsome young man had won the young Lady Latimer's heart.

This was a part of Amabel's plan. She could not think much, but one thought took possession of her mind. Never, never should a suspicion be aroused that her affection had wandered from Lord Latimer. Not for her own sake. She was too innocent

and childish to think much about herself; but for his. No one should ever think she had failed in her duty and gratitude to him.

It was on this resolution that she acted through the day. Not knowing exactly what she did, or how she did it; but trying to be his wife, attending to his wishes, coming forward in a gentle quiet way to honour him.

When it came to writing to him, she sat with a mind almost as much paralyzed as at first. She felt too guilty to allow herself to pour out her feelings of grief at the separation. Something, she knew not what, withheld her from dwelling on her penitence. She was too much in awe of him to enter on argument, or to comment on what he said. She sat with her arms on the table, and her two hands pressed on her two eyes, as if thus to bring thought to her brain. But nothing came. That brain seemed a blank.

Finally, she only wrote these few words ; and, from her feelings of shame and humiliation, would not allow herself any beginning.

“ I will do all you advise. I have but one wish in the world, and that is, to please you. Forgive me,

“ Your grateful wife,

“ AMABEL.”

She wept when she read what she had written. The few words said much to her. The “ Forgive me ” burst passionately from her heart.

Perhaps, however, there was nothing remarkable in the fact that Lord Latimer read her letter, when it reached him, in a different spirit. The few words expressed only what he already felt too deeply, too dismally. His wife wished to be a dutiful wife, but loved him not. The letter, gentle, penitent, submissive, carried no soothing message of affection to his wounded heart.

He had not expected it would, yet there was a bitter feeling in his soul as he tore it into atoms.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE fixity with which Amabel gave herself up to one idea delivered her from the influence of nervous fears and childish terrors. Her mind was so full that her solitude was even too full of thought. She was no longer a child. Instead of a gradual, gentle sliding from childish and girlish into womanly thoughts, she had suddenly leapt into them. She suddenly saw a thousand things undreamed of in her youthful philosophy, and her eyes wandered from one to the other, and endeavoured, but in vain, to master each. In vain; for not only in her present bewilderment, but probably at no time in her life, would her intellect be of the

order which thinks clearly, or speculates wisely, on the operations of the human mind. In vain, therefore, she endeavoured to master what *she* felt and what *he* felt ; she could but con over, in a wild, agitated way, the past, the present, and the future—the short past of a few days, and the short future of the next months, taking to herself, as a calming thought, that she would show her repentance by entire devotion to her husband's wishes.

It was an interruption to her thoughts, instead of, as it had been, a consolation, when, late in the day, Mr. and Mrs. Hatchford paid their call. They came to ask if there was any news of Lord Latimer's return.

"No ; he is obliged to go abroad," Amabel replied, in an unsteady voice ; a voice so unsteady that her two kind visitors immediately began to pour out their little commonplace consolations. Mr. Hatchford recurred to his first idea on the practical benefits of short

partings; and Mrs. Hatchford, among other things, observed that it was better to grieve at parting with friends than to have no friends to part from.

Amabel listened without hearing, and thanked them, without knowing for what. Her mind was very full and very much agitated, and these little truisms, however they may suit some quiescent minds, cannot still the agitation even of a child. When they had exhausted their store of comforts, she said,

“Lord Latimer wishes me to do all I can here. He trusts me, and I will try to act as he wishes. But I am very young and ignorant, and you must help me.”

There was so much pathos in her tone that both her kind guests, with a dew in their eyes, hastened to assure her of their assistance. As the best help he could offer, Mr. Hatchford then observed,

“You will, of course, keep to all the rules Lord Latimer laid down.”



“ Oh ! yes,” Amabel replied, with a little shuddering sigh ; “ I will keep to his rules.” She hardly knew why the thought of them oppressed and worried her ; but they did so. It was a kind of inward protest against that mechanical life that she had been leading. A moment afterwards she added, “ But I will do more than my rules now. I will try to understand, and to do all he did. You must help me.”

They promised her again their cordial assistance, and, as they walked home together, said how interesting a young creature Lady Latimer was ; but that there was anything but a natural sorrow on her young mind they never imagined.

Amabel remained alone again with her thoughts, not mastering them, but maturing more and more her plans for the future. Many little things, many smaller plans, had to be considered, but all merged in the one great plan of devoting herself to honour her

husband—of covering by her present devotion that guilty spot in the past. It was only as connected with that painful recollection that her thoughts ever recurred to Eustace Hardinge. He was gone as a dream of a night.

When she went to bed at the close of her lonely yet excited day, she prayed again with fervent prayers for help and strength. In these few days she had come to need religious consolation, and her mind flew to it and found it. Unable to argue, her sense of guilt seemed to be confined to Lord Latimer—it did not make her afraid of approaching her Father in Heaven. She felt sad and weak and miserable, and she betook herself with confidence to Him who, she had been taught, but never had felt before, was a present help in trouble. It was a state of mind which no doubt required instruction, but in its childlike trust could not but be efficacious.

In the middle of the following day, Mr. Lee arrived, bringing Virginia with him. Amabel was astonished, and for the moment felt unprepared to meet him and his questionings; but the strong determination she had formed to bury her wandering in oblivion, came to her aid.

“Why, my dearest child,” he said, “how is this? I thought you were to be off to London, for your presentation, on Monday or Tuesday?”

“Yes, I was,” she replied, her eyes tearful, and her colour coming and going, as *that* future, till now forgotten, was suddenly presented; “but it is all changed now.”

“But how, or why? It is very sudden, is it not?”

“Have you not heard from Lord Latimer?” Amabel said, composing herself, and trying to speak with the calm dignity she felt to be incumbent on her. “He told me he would write to you.”

“Yes, he wrote ; but it seems so strange, I can hardly understand it. And he wishes you to stay here, my poor child.”

Lord Latimer had made a most plausible history to Mr. Lee ; and Mrs. Lee was quite satisfied with it. But Mr. Lee, as we know, had never half liked the marriage, and he was suspicious.

“Of course,” Amabel replied, with spirit. “He may be away for some months ; and of course I could not go out visiting without him. Besides, he wishes me to do some things here.”

Mr. Lee was surprised, and inwardly amused. The idea of Amabel doing anything always did amuse him. But she satisfied him that there was no horrible mystery. Somehow or other he had had a fear about Eustace Hardinge. When he had heard of his accident and long stay at Audricourt, he had said to himself—for he would not say it to any other person—“I

hope Amabel will not discover how dull Lord Latimer is !”

“I have brought Virginia,” he said. “Lord Latimer suggested that she and her governess might come to you for a time.”

“I know,” Amabel said—“he is so kind. He thought of it directly.”

“Her governess is away,” Mr. Lee went on, becoming still further satisfied. “But I could not bear to think of you alone, my poor child, so I brought her off at once. Her governess can follow her here in a few days, if you like to keep her.”

“I should like it extremely,” Amabel said. “I felt very lonely the first day Lord Latimer went; and though I am more used to it now, I shall be very glad to keep Virginia, if I may.”

Mr. Lee stayed for one night with his daughter, and only once, during all the hours they passed together, did she lose her self-command. It was at a question she

might have expected, but did not. "And how did you and that young Hardinge get on together?"

It was evening, and Amabel was working. Some part of her tremor she was able therefore to conceal. The crimson blush of shame and consciousness *was* hidden by her stooping head; the terror at this sudden flush of shame was also mastered; she thought she answered quietly, "He was very easy to get on with—he was ill, you know, and that made it easy." But Mr. Lee, although at the moment he spoke he had forgotten his suspicions, detected a something in voice and manner that alarmed him—alarmed and distressed him. He felt a conviction that his suspicion had not been altogether groundless, after all.

He was wise, however. It was easy to discover his daughter's determination to rise above whatever it was that had occurred; he saw, and, with admiration and astonish-

ment, bowed to her will. He replied with a quiet answer, asked another question about the young man, as if to show that he had made no observations, and then banished the subject from his mind—that is, endeavoured to do so, for he was not successful.

Virginia was left with her sister. She was a companionable little girl, as quick and useful as Sophia, but with a share of Amabel's refinement and gentleness. Her society made a great difference to Amabel. With a little companion to attend her, she felt no alarm, and began to bestir herself among her poor neighbours. When the governess came—a well-instructed though not accomplished person, Amabel turned her attention also towards her own improvement. She had passed from a child into a woman, and desires to become wiser and better had entered into and taken a lodging in her mind. She wished to be more fitted to understand Lord Latimer's grave books,

and she consulted the governess on the subject. A course of study was laid out, and her time began to be filled. When there is a definite object, to which all efforts tend, one point to which all reflections turn, life, however dreary without, cannot be dreary within. Hope is excitement, and it is enough—the human mind is satisfied with it—often much more satisfied with that as a companion than with a possession, however dear or prized.



## CHAPTER XVI.

LORD LATIMER had done better for Amabel than for himself; and yet when he made his plan, he made it for himself, and not for her. A something had come to him which made Audricourt hateful—that abode in which he had lived for so many years in cold peace—that home which of late had been enlivened into warm happiness, had become odious in his eyes; and as he thought first of himself, he planned this escape into foreign lands, that he might forget Audricourt, and that of which it had been the scene. When this relief had been planned for himself, he then turned to

Amabel, and tried to arrange with forethought and justice for her future life also. To uphold her who had involuntarily erred; to shield from suspicion her who had so ingenuously confessed.

The plan for her was successful. It might not have been so had she been, as he supposed her to be, the victim of a guilty, yet guiltless attachment. But as it was, it was certainly for a time successful. Her thoughts were fixed on him, and him alone. To make her peace with him whom she had wounded, whom she had offended, absorbed her to the exclusion of every other thought; and if there had been a wandering of the affection, it had returned to its object with redoubled force.

But for himself, for his peace, at least, he had planned less wisely. He had been abroad twice or thrice in his life, and on each occasion his travels had given him the tranquil, passionless enjoyment which was all

he desired. His love for pictures has been mentioned. It was the warmest of his sensations, and on these occasions his taste had been gratified. He remembered this, and hoped to be gratified again. He also enjoyed a fine climate and a bright landscape. The man wrapt in himself is very capable of feeling these simply physical pleasures.

All these and other calm enjoyments he called to mind, and fancied that he might enjoy them again. But he had no knowledge of human nature, and, with all his study, no knowledge of himself. He did not calculate that a tortured and anxious heart cannot take pleasure in small things. A sad one may; a heart sad, but desirous to forget. But the restlessness of a jealous and disappointed spirit requires something large as its grief to divert it from grief.

Lord Latimer's heart had been touched at last. He did not know that he had a heart;

nor had anyone else discovered the fact ; and how should they ? It had been cased, as dead and embalmed hearts have sometimes been, in stone. But, in the centre of that cold monument he had built over it, there lay a heart, and it had been touched at last. It had begun to speak when first he found his young wife, young, soft, and gentle, depending on him for guidance and protection. A well of tenderness, of something altogether different from his first passionate love, had been touched and had oozed out. But happiness, however beneficial in many ways to man's nature, does not conduce to thought. It is too free for thought. A perfectly happy person leads too winged and birdlike a life to have much time or inclination for reflection. Lord Latimer, therefore, had not speculated on his unwonted feelings. He had not discovered that he had this heart ; the routine into which he had cast its happiness had had a soporific effect ; it

muffled his new sensations, and hid them even from his own sight.

It was far otherwise now. That heart which had been touched, and had been too blest to discover its existence, was now cast off and desolate. In vain the confidence reposed in him ; in vain the trust thus expressed in his noblest qualities ; in vain the docile submission to his will. With love, these things would have been priceless treasures. Without love they were nothing. In one week, by a temptation that was no temptation, his wife's affections had been drawn from him ; and stung, and sore, and wounded, and humiliated, his poor heart strove in vain to find a stoic philosophy that would teach him to endure, or to forget.

He sought to forget, but could not. The routine of life was broken up, and he had nothing to turn to. With blank eyes he gazed on glorious pictures and glowing

skies ; gazed and saw nothing. With wandering mind he read and understood nothing ; shortly, with a humiliation which yet was not the worst of his feeling, he was forced to own that he found his best distraction in the society of the half-crazed man over whom he had undertaken to watch.

However useful it might be in some ways, Lord Latimer's plan had not therefore answered, so far as his peace was concerned. He felt this, yet nothing would have induced him to change it.

Once a week he wrote to Amabel, and once a week he received her answers. Each looked forward to these days as *the* days of their lives. Each, before the incoming letter arrived, speculated for hours on what it would contain, and, before the days of departure, on what they each would reply. Yet nothing could be more unsatisfactory, more prosaic than the letters that went, and the letters that came. Each watched the style

of each, and conformed to it exactly. Amabel watched for a tone, a word of relenting, that she might pour out her feelings of grief and repentance. To him, still angry and forgiving, she did not dare to speak. She answered his questions, gave him messages from Mr. Hatchford and the steward, and there the correspondence ended. Of her longing for his return, of her intense desire to see his face again, of her wish to devote her life wholly to him—life, and heart, and affection—she did not dare to speak. And Lord Latimer watched for a something that might betray what he felt he knew too well was not there; watched with ever-rising and ever-decaying hope, and, finding it not, remained himself immovable. And thus the weary Summer months dragged by.

## CHAPTER XVII.

VIRGINIA and her governess remained with Amabel. Mr. and Mrs. Lee, deprived of all their daughters, were dreary enough at home ; but Mr. Lee, who could not rid himself of his private suspicion, was determined the arrangement should continue ; and, as Amabel procured masters for her little sister, Mrs. Lee saw such benefits in the arrangement that she consented also.

Sophia did not approve, and, on a visit that she paid to her home, spoke her feelings warmly.

“The whole thing, mamma, is so unnatural that I can’t understand how you and papa can countenance it. If husbands



are to marry young wives, or indeed any wives, and then take themselves off in this way, I don't see what is to be the end of it."

Mrs. Lee thought exactly the same, and had said the same to her husband, but, as was her custom, took now the defensive line.

"You know, Sophia, there are no such things as general rules. As a general rule, of course I agree with you; but general rules never apply to particular cases."

"That seems to me very poor morality, mamma. We may take any act, then, out of the general rule of the commandments, and say we will try it as a particular case."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Lee. She never *could* argue with Sophia. Sophia bewildered her brain, and though she knew what she meant, she could not express her meanings. After a moment, however, she collected some thoughts, and went on—

“What I mean is, that there are circumstances which force the common rules of life to give way. As I understood Lord Latimer’s letter, there was some early connection which made him desirous to pay this attention to an old and much-distressed friend. As he did not tell us the circumstances, we cannot judge. Perhaps he did feel himself forced to go.”

“But then, why not take Amabel with him?”

“Ah! we don’t know,” was all poor perplexed Mrs. Lee could say.

“You know, mamma, I never liked the marriage. I foresaw evil would come of it. You did not like me to speak, and so I said but little; but I knew Amabel was given up to misery, and perhaps worse. It seems to me the most unnatural thing that ever was done—to marry a beautiful young girl of seventeen, and then to go away and leave her quite by herself in a large house.”

“He wrote about Virginia, my dear Sophia.”

“And that is the very thing, mamma, that I think so shocking. If he had written for you or me, there would have been some use in the plan—we should have had our wits about us, and helped and advised the poor thing; but to write for a child of nine! It is like writing for a blind man to take care of a blind child.”

This conversation, and a variety of others on the same topic, took place about four months after Lord Latimer's departure. Sophia urged that there should be a recall of Virginia, and that they should then see what Lord Latimer would do for his wife. Mrs. Lee would not give way to Sophia while she was at home; but after she was gone she found how her words and suspicions haunted her brain, and she proposed the recall to Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee cared very little about Sophia's

opinion—she had gained the mastery over her mother, and the house, and most things that went on at home, but she never had mastered her father's mind. He never fought with her, but seldom agreed. He had made up his mind now, and no arguments could change him.

“Why did you not tell Sophia, my dear, that it is not even for fathers and mothers to interfere with husbands and wives, unless there is a very strong reason.”

This was his answer when she forcibly and concisely retailed Sophia's opinions.

“She would have said there was a strong reason now,” said Mrs. Lee, for she could be quick enough with her husband; “and she would have been right. Perhaps we ought not to acquiesce in such a state of things.”

“As Lord Latimer never contemplated a return in four months, we ought to have stated our objections before he left Eng-

land, instead of agreeing to send Virginia. It is too late to refuse to acquiesce now."

"I wish I had thought of that," Mrs. Lee said, regretfully, thinking what an opportunity for vanquishing Sophia she had lost. "But for how long are we engaged?" she added. "I don't suppose you intend this state of things to go on for ever."

"No, no," Mr. Lee replied, with decision; but he entered no more into the question. In fact, he did not intend it to go on long, but had not made up his mind when to interfere—not for two or three months yet, and therefore he put the subject from his mind.

He had by this time a pretty strong—for it was a daily-growing—conviction that there had been something on Amabel's part for which she was undergoing correction. The kind terms in which Lord Latimer had written, and the manner of Amabel, satisfied him about the result. For the time being,

however strange the separation might be, he did feel it was best to leave the husband and wife to themselves; and he did also feel that the company of Virginia and her governess was, under the circumstances, the best thing that could be arranged.

Meanwhile two more months flowed on, and during these last two a change came over Amabel.

Nothing so easy to live upon, nothing so animating and inspiriting, as a hope. But then it must be a real hope—a hope full-grown and strong, not a feeble, infant hope, whose fragile life seems daily passing away. And almost any hope which, though bright at first, instead of coming nearer, seems, as time passes, to become more distant, turns to this fragile infant thing, and makes the heart sick.

So it was with Amabel. The zest with which she had set herself about her duties died away; the desire for self-improvement

languished ; and when once that which had filled her days became languid and wearisome, the spur that had supported her spirit was gone, and she too languished. The change was scarcely perceptible, but day by day she lost her smooth, childlike freshness of tint, her cheek became paler, her step slower, her eye duller. She became the prey of fancies, subject to starts, subject to fears and terrors ; not childlike, bodily, or even ghostly terrors, but mental terrors, expectations that something was going to happen, that bad news would come.

For the most part she kept her feelings pent within ; but the constant hearing of wheels was one of her fancies, and, though without saying what she expected, she would often rise from luncheon at this fancied sound ; then, after going a few steps, recollect herself, and, sitting down again, observe, “ I thought somebody was coming to call.”

One Sunday evening—it was at the end of six months—she was reading to Virginia in the drawing-room ; she suddenly paused in her reading ; the book was “Agathos,” and Virginia, interested in the allegory, was not pleased. She looked at her sister, and saw her head elevated, like that of a startled deer.

“What is the matter, Amabel dear?” inquired the child, surprised.

“Dear” was the condescending epithet which she bestowed on her great favourites. There were “Amabel dear,” “papa dear,” and “Neddy dear,” a tall, strongly-built brother. These were the only privileged possessors of the term.

“I thought I heard Lord Latimer’s step,” Amabel replied, still listening.

“Lord Latimer !” exclaimed Virginia, staring. “Is *he* coming to-night?”

Amabel recovered herself, drew down her neck, and sighed.



“Oh! yes, Virginia—perhaps,” she said.  
“I expect him any day.”

“*Do* you?” cried Virginia, astonished.  
“I did not know—I am very sorry.”

“Sorry!” and Amabel looked for a moment like a young tiger, and as if she could have sprung upon her sister—“sorry that he should come back to me, when I think I shall die if he doesn’t!”

The fierce words astonished Virginia still farther; but she was a quick and sensible little thing. She saw that her sister was excited, and required to be soothed, and she soothed her.

“I am only sorry, Amabel dear,” she said, stroking her cheek, “because I suppose I shall have to leave you when he comes—and I am so fond of you. Of course I am glad for *you*.”

“Oh! yes, be glad,” Amabel said, with a gasp; and a tear fell from her eye.

“And now will you finish the story?”

Virginia said. Not that she any longer cared for the story, but thinking in her young wisdom that it was best to change the subject. When she went to bed she confidentially told her governess that "somehow she did not think Amabel was very well."

"I was thinking the same," was the reply. "It is strange," she continued, in a musing tone, "that I should not have remarked the change in Lady Latimer till to-day; but it was while she sat at church, when that bright gleam of sun suddenly burst out and fell on her face, that I remarked how thin she had grown."

"Yes," Virginia said, "I have seen that. Do you know that her wedding-ring tumbled off the other day when she was playing? She got so red that I did not like to say anything about it: but I think it is because her hands are so thin. But then you know," Virginia added, "people do grow fat and

thin, don't they? If we were *always* growing fat, we should get too big."

Her governess smiled, but a moment afterwards observed,

"I had been considering just before you came up whether I ought not to mention the subject to your mamma and papa. Of course I have no business with Lady Latimer, but as there is no one here to speak, it might be right."

"I think I had better do it," Virginia replied. "If you write, you will frighten them; but if I write, they will only see about it. It is my day for mamma to-morrow, isn't it?"

And Virginia did write, and more strongly than she had at first intended; for when Amabel's maid was putting her to bed, she also spoke to her on the subject.

"My lady is not ill," she observed, reassuringly, when she saw that her first remark had startled the child. "Nobody

can call a person ill when there is nothing the matter with them; but I have had to take in her gowns ever so, and I thought yesterday, as I was doing it, that I would tell you, Miss Virginia. I think my lord or your papa ought to be told of it."

On the same morning, however, that Virginia's letter reached her home, Mr. Lee received one from Lord Latimer. It was marked *Private*, and with great perplexity of mind Mr. Lee read it.

It began with an apology for troubling him, and a further apology that he was forced not only to trouble him with a letter, but must also ask him to take a journey. He wished to send a message to Amabel. A circumstance had occurred which he was afraid of mentioning by letter, and he thought her father was the proper person to bear the message. He then went on—

"You must, no doubt, have been distressed and perplexed at my separation from

my wife ; but believe me when I tell you that it was inevitable. Whether or not that separation can ever end depends much on the spirit in which she bears the intelligence I have now to send. I trust to you to report to me faithfully what occurs.

“ You will then, if you please, be the bearer to her from me of this message—that *he* is going to be married. You must excuse me if I offer no explanations ; you must excuse me if I ask you to be guarded in your questionings of Amabel ; you must excuse me also if I request you to consider my letter as strictly confidential. It is due, I think, both to me and to your daughter, that if ever our former happiness should be restored, the cause of its interruption should be unknown. Had I dared to trust this message to a letter, it would have been kept from you also ; but, as I am unconscious what will be the effect of the intelligence, I fear to send it to her while in solitude.”

There was not much more in the letter. Mr. Lee found it when he went out for his early walk; and during his walk he cogitated on it, and on the question how best to act. Sometimes he said, "Poor child!—poor child! I never liked the marriage—never!" then suddenly broke off from that reflection to ask how he was to conceal Lord Latimer's letter from his wife. His private suspicions he had succeeded in concealing, but a letter had never yet been concealed.

When he re-entered the house he was met by Mrs. Lee with Virginia's letter; and though the contents made him uneasy, it put an end to his perplexities. He simply determined to conceal the fact of Lord Latimer's having written, altogether, and to act on Virginia's news.

"I will go directly," he said, as he returned it to Mrs. Lee.

"You! I thought, perhaps, I had better

go," she said, surprised at this rapid settlement of the question. "Not that I think there is much the matter."

"It is easier for me to go than for you; and if I think there is any cause for anxiety, I will send at once to fetch you. I will ride to —, and go by train."

And so it was settled. Mrs. Lee was not alarmed, and she guessed Mr. Lee was—he always was. She agreed, therefore, without reluctance to his plan.

For a single traveller, not much encumbered with luggage, it was easy to go to Audricourt by train, and took a shorter time than posting. But it was a disagreeable journey with luggage, as it was performed by going on several different lines, and in different conveyances.

Mr. Lee set off at once, and arrived at Audricourt soon after luncheon. All the way as he went, between his calls to porters and conversations with station-masters,

&c., he debated in his own mind whether he should give the message naturally, or work up to it with preparation. And, as is commonly the case after much cogitation, he arrived at Audricourt totally undecided on the point. He felt it must be left to chance.

In the hall, going out for a walk with her governess, he met Virginia. She flew to him with a scream of astonishment and rapture.

“Oh! papa, dear, are you come to see us?”

“Why, you sent for me, missy,” he said, playfully; “did you not?”

“Oh!” Virginia said, becoming grave, “perhaps, papa dear, it will be as well not to say that.”

“No, no,” he replied. “Well, and how is Amabel to-day?”

“*Very* thin,” answered the little girl.

“Lady Latimer is no worse,” the governess said, re-assuringly.



“I am come to have a little talk with her,” Mr. Lee went on. “Where shall I find her?”

“She is up in her room. She is doing her letter to Lord Latimer; and she is not going out any more, she said. Shall I call her, papa?”

“Yes; go and tell her that I am come to see her—that I want to have a little talk with her; and ask whether I shall go up to her, or whether she will come down to me. And then you shall go and take your walk, darling, for I should like to have Amabel to myself.”

He remained with the governess, questioning her a little about Amabel's health, and Virginia sped up to her sister.

Neither Virginia nor Mr. Lee had any idea of the fragile state of Amabel's nervous system—how a preying sorrow had been slowly undermining it. They could not guess how she lived in the constant vague

anticipation of vague bad news. Virginia was as discreet a little thing as could be expected at her age, and her "Only think, Amabel, dear, that papa is here!" as she entered the room quickly, was as simple a way of giving her intelligence as could be thought of. But Amabel almost screamed her reply.

"Papa here! Oh! why?"

"He is come to see us. He says he wants to have a little talk with you; and shall he come up here, or will you come down to him?"

"I will come down," she said, rising; and she passed Virginia in her breathless haste.

Breathless and agitated, her cheeks crimson with excitement, she flew down and threw herself into her father's arms—threw herself with a movement so rapid, and one so unlike the gentle movements of the gentle Amabel, that Mr. Lee felt at once distressed

and afraid. He did not know what to make of it.

At the first glance he thought her looking blooming and lovely ; but as rapidly as the crimson glow had appeared, it ebbed away, and she was pale when he loosened himself from her agitated embrace.

“I came by the train,” he said, speaking quickly to prevent questions, “and if you will have me for a night, my lady, I mean to stay with you.”

“By the train !” Amabel repeated, as if scenting out some concealed secret.

“Yes ; I rode to ——. There is my small bundle. If you will be hospitable, and entertain me, will you kindly have it conveyed to my room ?”

His playful tone for the moment allayed her fears, and she turned away to order a room to be got ready. She then led the way into the drawing-room, and observed, with a sigh,

“I am always afraid now. I thought perhaps you had heard from Lord Latimer.”

The words were spoken more as a statement than a question; but she fixed her eyes on him while she spoke, and, not perfectly satisfied with the look of his countenance, she became agitated again.

“Have you?—have you heard?” she asked, with eagerness.

“Why, yes, darling,” he replied, thinking he had better say it all out at once. “I had a letter from him this morning, with a message for you. That was what brought me here.”

“Oh, papa!” springing up again from the seat on which she had seated herself. “What is it? I knew it; I felt it from the first! Tell me; only tell me!”

“I will tell you, my dear child, whatever you please. I came to tell you, only don’t agitate yourself in this way. There, sit down and be quiet.” He drew a chair to her side,

and put his arm fondly on her shoulder. He was really very much afraid of what he was going to discover, but he wished to show her that she might trust to his love and pity. His little preparations were not, however, exactly calculated to soothe. "His message, darling, is this," and he could not prevent his voice from becoming grave, "that *he* is going to be married. He was afraid to write it to you himself."

Her eyes, wide distended, were fixed on him till he ceased ; and then she screamed,

"*He!* It must not, shall not be ! It *cannot* be !"

"My darling," her father said, himself trembling with fear. "What is all this? What has happened to cause all this misery?"

"Oh ! I can't tell," she cried, "but it must not be. Leave me, leave me, I must write," and she rose and fled away to the door. There she paused, her hand on the

lock, her other hand, which her father did not see, on her heart. He rose also and gently followed her.

“Amabel, darling, do talk to me,” he was beginning soothingly, when he caught sight of a cheek deadly pale, and a drooping head. He sprang forward and caught her as she fell.

It was only a faint, he thought, and he carried her up and laid her on her bed ; and summoning her maid, assisted in restoring her to consciousness. When he thought he saw a faint colour in her cheek, he sent the maid away ; he was afraid of what her first words would be. When she did begin to speak, it was wanderingly. He begged her to be quiet, and she would soon be well ; and she answered by addressing one of her brothers, begging him not to cry, for she *never* would tell that he had hurt her. Evidently recurring to some childish scene.

He waited for a little while, and became

more and more alarmed, so very incoherent and disjointed were her speeches. But they were all of home scenes, and he became less afraid of leaving her with her maid. He called Mrs. Hooper, therefore, and desired her to watch by Amabel ; to prevent her talking, to keep her quiet ; and went down to despatch a messenger for Mrs. Lee, and to write a note to Dr. Sutton.

“ Of course,” he soliquized, “ I must wish for secrecy as much and more than Lord Latimer does ; but my darling’s health is paramount, and there is something about her that frightens me.”

His arrangements took him some little time, for he despatched a messenger on horseback for Mrs. Lee, who was to order horses for her as he went. Mr. Lee had unbounded faith in his wife’s qualities as a physician, and felt as if he could hardly live till her arrival.

When his arrangements were completed,

he returned to Amabel. He was met in the corridor by Mrs. Hooper, who told him Lady Latimer had insisted on getting up, and was writing.

“And indeed, sir,” she added, “I thought it best to comply, for my lady seems to have something on her mind ; she said unless she might write to my lord, she should go mad.”

Mr. Lee said she was right, and went on. He found Amabel writing fast. She looked up with wild eyes as he appeared at the door, and he saw that, though one cheek was pale, on the other there was a crimson spot as large as a crown-piece.

“Don’t stop me, papa,” she cried, with something angry in her tones—“I *must* write.”

“Write, darling, in peace,” he said ; “only don’t tire yourself.”

She made no answer, but wrote on with passionate haste, dashing her pen along, and



now and then raising her eyes with a suspicious, half-defiant look at her father. Yet he sat by, with a pretence of a book in his hand; and though he saw that the crimson spot had spread to the other cheek, he allowed her to finish without interruption. She was not very long; and when she had folded and directed the letter, he rose.

“Now, darling, I want you to lie down again. I will take your letter. To Lord Latimer, is it? I am going to write myself.”

She gave it into his hand, only saying, “You must be sure it goes,” and then lay back in her seat, as if exhausted.

For a moment her father thought and hoped that she was going to burst into tears; but the softening expression and the quivering lip were only for an instant—the next moment she said,

“Did Stephen strike me? No, he didn’t; but I think somebody did.”

“You had better lie down and rest, my dear child—you are tired. I will go out for a walk, and come back again.”

Mr. Lee did the best he could, speaking cheerfully and soothingly, and Amabel consented; but after she had lain down, her eyes pursued him with a look he did not like. He would not use the words “a mad look,” but he felt them; and “I wish her mother was here,” burst almost audibly from his lips.

He went down, and wrote a few words to Lord Latimer, saying his intelligence had affected Amabel a good deal, but he could hardly tell in what way, and would write again the following day. But on the following day he had to write in a different manner. When Doctor Sutton arrived, he was not pleased with Amabel's looks.

“If I had seen her a fortnight ago,” he said, looking reproachfully at Mr. Lee, “I might have been of greater use.”

Mr. Lee felt the same ; but it was useless to think of that now.

Doctor Sutton spoke hopefully of the effects of a soothing draught, which he gave before he went, having first insisted on seeing Amabel in bed. It was to be repeated at her usual hour for rest. "If she had a tolerably quiet night," he said, "he hoped the fever in the brain, which he dreaded, might be staved off." And he went, leaving poor Mr. Lee to a night of intense anxiety. It passed, however, better than he had expected ; and when at seven in the morning Mrs. Lee arrived, he met her cheerfully, begging her to rest till after Doctor Sutton's opinion as to her seeing Amabel had been obtained.

Doctor Sutton came at nine, and was not satisfied. Amabel was quiet, but the bad symptoms had not abated. He left his directions as to where he might be found during the day ; and was not surprised

when, early in the afternoon, he was summoned back in haste. Before night Amabel was in a high fever and delirium ; and on a second visit at twelve at night, Doctor Sutton said,

“ You should telegraph, I think, for Lord Latimer.”

It was done in these words :—

*“ There are letters on the road, but Lady Latimer is ill with brain-fever. Dr. Sutton is in constant attendance, and advises that Lord Latimer should be informed.”*

The word “ *summoned* ” Mr. Lee did not like to write. In the miserable uncertainty in which he was left regarding the relations of his daughter with her husband, he did not dare to dictate to him how to act. But he longed for his arrival almost as he had longed for that of his wife.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

LORD LATIMER was to be pitied. He was awaiting at Florence, in an anxiety so new to his mind that he scarcely realized it, the answer to his letter to Mr. Lee. A thousand times a day his mind—that hard, self-controlled, unimaginative mind—acted to itself the scene which the receipt of his message would cause. His love—the unconquered, unconquerable love he felt for his wife, a passion that pursued him all day long, making him a very slave to its influence, had taught him thus much—he could imagine what love might be in another; and, measuring all things by his own self, he had come to invest poor Amabel's

wandering fancy with the features of his own ardent passion. The more, therefore, he dwelt on the scene, the more forlorn and miserable became his heart.

Then arrived, no direct answer, but the stunning answer of the telegraph—life and love both lost. This fever of the brain was the consequence of that scene he had pictured. He could understand it. His own poor brain was in a fiery fever as he read. Despairing love and wild jealousy, and rack-ing fear, coursed each other round and round, during the few short moments that he sat horror-stricken gazing at the words.

But fear prevailed—fear and love; the desire to see her once more rose to the surface, became the prevailing feeling of the heart, and he set off for England, leaving a servant to receive the letters spoken of, and to follow with them as fast as steam could bring them. The word letters suggested one from Amabel—perhaps the last he should ever receive

from her! Perhaps it contained all he should ever know of her feelings. He was much to be pitied as he travelled homewards, uncomforted by any hope.

He travelled fast, and arrived on the seventh day of Amabel's fever, counting from the moment of her seizure, at Audricourt. At the lodge he stopped and beckoned to the woman to come to him. For a moment she did not know her pale master. The face quivering with emotion was so strangely unlike the impassive face to which she was accustomed, that she did not recognise it. When she did she waited for no question, but said, pityingly, "A shade better this afternoon;" and he sank back and drove on.

He arrived before it had been thought possible—owing to the badness of the weather and the delays of packets—that he could arrive, and he walked into the house and found it deserted. He walked upstairs and stood outside the open door of Amabel's

room, sane enough to be afraid to enter, but otherwise scarcely knowing what he did ; and there he stood for several minutes, until a housemaid saw him and went for Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee was as astonished at his appearance as the lodgekeeper had been. All remembrance of the faults of old Lord Latimer faded away into one feeling of intense pity, and he too said, soothingly, "A shade better this afternoon." A moment afterwards the haggard careworn face suggested to him that other comfort was wanted, and he added, "She asks for you incessantly. I am glad you are come."

A violent emotion convulsed the wretched husband's face, and he turned away. In what spirit did she ask for him?—was it love, or was it repentance? He could not ask ; nor, had he asked, could Mr. Lee have told.

In all her wanderings, nothing had escaped from Amabel's lips concerning that



mystery that wrapped her mind. She either thought she was a child at home, or else she unceasingly asked when Lord Latimer would come. Three or four times "Forgive me" was murmured, but in a soft, low tone, different to her ravings, as if even in delirium his injunctions of secrecy swayed her.

Though unable to give any further satisfaction, Mr. Lee followed Lord Latimer after a moment, and said,

"You must rest yourself. Doctor Sutton will be here in another hour, and will tell you if you may be allowed to see her. Will it not be better to rest and refresh yourself, that you may be prepared, should he permit it."

"Is it likely?" he forced out.

"I cannot tell," Mr. Lee replied. "You must consult him yourself. He knows how anxiously she asks for you; but he knows nothing—we none of us know anything."

Lord Latimer still stood pale, haggard, and as if unable to act or think. Mr. Lee thought it was no time for ceremony, and treating him like a son-in-law, put his arm within his, and conducted him to his own door.

“Your room is ready,” he said; “for we thought you might possibly come to-night. Indeed, Lord Latimer, it will be best that you should refresh yourself. I will send Blackwood to you this moment.”

He opened the door, and almost pushed him into his room. As he was turning away, Lord Latimer caught him. “Is this the consequence?” he said hoarsely.

Mr. Lee turned back.

“I really cannot say,” he replied. “She was certainly much excited, and she immediately wrote to you. Her letter is on the road; but in what way it affected her, I cannot tell.”

Lord Latimer withdrew his grasp, and

became paler than before. He was answered.

“All I know is,” Mr. Lee said, pityingly, “that she asks only for you—for you only, and that incessantly—no other name,” he added, after a moment’s thought, averting his eyes.

Lord Latimer turned away, and the door closed.

Doctor Sutton, when consulted, advised that Lord Latimer should see Amabel.

Mr. Lee thought it absolutely necessary to tell him that there had been some misunderstanding, the nature of which he did not know, but which might possibly cause excitement in the meeting.

Doctor Sutton gave a scornful toss of his head, as much as to say there was no need to tell him that, and possibly implying that the nature of it *he* perfectly understood; but his verbal answer was in a more formal strain.

“I don’t expect that she will recognise him—if she does, she has asked for him so constantly, that it will not surprise. I don’t think it can do harm—it may do good.”

And he saw her. He had seen his father and mother languish and die ; and though he had loved them in a certain sense, he had seen every sight of suffering and gloom with a composure of mind that seemed incapable of being shaken ; but when he now looked on the fair young bride, from whom he had parted in the bloom of her beauty, the strong man was beaten down. Even though she loved him not, he felt too keenly that he loved her, and that his heart was broken.

She did not know him—she was quiet, and his approach did not disturb her ; but her eyes wandered about, and rested nowhere. He saw her, but received no comfort.

The days passed on with little change. The fever was rarely violent, but would not give way. "If her strength can hold out," Doctor Sutton constantly repeated, "there is no cause for fear." But, as every one knew, that *if* admitted a world of danger.

Lord Latimer moved about like a spectre, rarely speaking; and, if he ever slept, showing little signs of rest in his face. Twice he took a walk with little Virginia. The child's sorrow soothed and touched him. In her grief she was as gentle as Amabel; and he turned to her from other faces with a feeling of relief.

During all this time, Mr. Lee was the sole actor in the house. He seemed to have suddenly become its master. Every one went to him. He was one of those men whose capacities never appear unless there is a violent call upon them; but in emergencies, their strong good sense becomes a rock to lean on.

And all the while *his* heart was devoured with an anxiety that left him no rest. Not the anxiety only for the life of his child, but for the mind. What had she done? Was there anything on her conscience? What had caused this misery? Day by day, almost hour by hour, he said he would ask Lord Latimer for the particulars of the case. It was right, he said, that he should know them. But this was in Lord Latimer's absence. When he looked in his face, his pity prevented the question he purposed. He could not say, "In what was she unfaithful?" There was an agony, a hopelessness in that haggard countenance which made him draw back and desist from probing the wound.

It was on the fourteenth day of the fever that it left Amabel. It had abated in the morning; towards evening it was gone. But it left her utterly exhausted. "If we can bring her through the night," Doctor

Sutton said, cheeringly, "there will be good hope." But again it was a fearful *if*!

Lord Latimer approached her bedside, and possibly she knew him. He fancied her languid eyes fixed for a moment in the direction where he stood ; but she had not strength enough to move even an eyelid, to lift a finger ; and he left her, un comforted. He left her because Mr. Lee commanded him to be gone. In this moment of awful suspense he could not trust Lord Latimer. He dreaded some outbreak either of love or despair. It was a singular change ! The soft-hearted father commanded himself, and was ready for every call. The stern, cold man was utterly broken.

Driven from Amabel's room, he shut himself into his library, and sat down to think. To think *what* ? That this life on which he had cast his heart was fading from him because it could not love him. His love had killed it. His thoughts, though they were

repeated many times a day, rarely wandered from this track ; he who had never thought all his life long whether he received love or gave it, was now racked and tortured for the lack of a young girl's affection.



## CHAPTER XIX.

HIS solitude was disturbed by Mr. Lee. The servant had arrived from Italy with the letters; and as everything was now taken to Mr. Lee, in his hands they had been placed. He knocked, and entered, and Lord Latimer rose up to receive him—started up with dread in his face.

“There is no change,” Mr. Lee said. “It was not that that brought me here. Your servant is come, and these letters were given to me.”

Lord Latimer’s face changed—the expression of anxiety as he hastily stretched out his hand was horrible and pitiful to see!

Mr. Lee held them fast for a minute. "I do not know what is in my poor child's letter," he said. "It was written in great excitement; this fever had at the very moment taken possession of her."

He paused. He hoped his words implied "be merciful," he hoped Lord Latimer would speak. But though he allowed Mr. Lee to finish before he again put forth his fingers, no sound escaped him; and as soon as he paused, the letters were taken, grasped, and he turned away. Mr. Lee also moved, but before he reached the door he came back again.

"Lord Latimer," he said in sad and solemn tones, "let me speak one word. What has passed between you and my child I know not; that there has been some fault I sadly fear. Let me hear you say this night that she is forgiven. Before morning she may have left us for ever; it will soothe me, it will I think hereafter be soothing to

yourself also, to feel that, while yet she breathed, you forgave her."

A gasp that was almost a sob escaped from Lord Latimer's quivering lips. He seized Mr. Lee's hands with a convulsive grasp, and shook it.

"Be in peace," he said, "there was little to forgive, and that is long forgiven. You shall know all in time. To-night I cannot speak."

And Mr. Lee, relieved in spirit, left him alone.

Lord Latimer uncovered the lamp which he had darkened, hating its light, and sat down to read. He took Amabel's letter, and trembled as he remarked the hurried large characters, so unlike his wife's usual timid girlish hand. But he tore the letter open and read. It began abruptly :

"What have I done that you should cast me off? I will not be cast off! I am your own faithful, obedient, loving wife, and

you have no right to cast me from you ! ”

Lord Latimer paused, and put his hands over his bewildered brows. Was he dreaming, or was she mad ? or to whom was the letter addressed ? He took up Mr. Lee’s letter, opened it also and read it. Mr. Lee simply said :

“ I have obeyed you. I came here to-day and found my poor child looking ill. I endeavoured to give her your message as gently as I could ; I gave it simply, asking no questions, and I must not conceal from you that it greatly affected her. In what manner, however, I am unable to tell until I have talked with her again.”

Still bewildered, Lord Latimer looked up and tried to recall to mind what his message had been. Suddenly a light burst upon him, and with that light a gleam of hope, that was like a gleam of light from Paradise. He cast aside Mr. Lee’s letter and returned to Amabel’s.

“When I went to you on *that* day, it was to ask you to pity and save and help me ; but you have not helped me. You have separated yourself from me. It was cruel ! But perhaps it was as well, because then I learned that it was you, and you only, that I loved ; that I ever did, that I do now love. If you ask me what came over me that day I do not know. I think I was tired of too much care, glad of change, and when change came too foolish to bear it ; and then when I saw that, I was vain and flattered ; oh ! worse, I was wicked then, guilty, guilty ! but I saw it, I knew it, I knew it was horrible, and I went to you to help me ; but you did not help me. You left me alone, and now you cast me off for ever.

“Forgive if I write what is wrong. I am almost mad when I think I may be too late ! I am your wife, and no other shall ever be your wife ; no other can ever love you as I do. I have waited for you all

these months, I have done all I can to obey and to please you. Will you not repent, and come back and forgive me? You must, for I *will* be forgiven!

“Your faithful, loving wife,

“AMABEL LATIMER.”

There was fever in the letter; but there was a force of truth which fever only strengthened. In her solitude, Amabel had meditated on the cause of her wandering, and had discovered it—it was kept in her heart, to be expressed at some time to Lord Latimer; and it came forth then. But that was the only part of the letter that bore the stamp of thought and reason. All else was the pouring forth of a soul agonized with dread—a dread, reasonless indeed, but not the less strong; and it carried conviction to the heart of her husband.

What conviction? That he was *loved*. For one moment a sense of joy and hope,

a sensation so blissful that it seemed to dissolve his whole being in love and thankfulness, stole over him, and melted his countenance; but the next moment the remembrance of the pale and motionless form he had left an hour before, floated before his eyes, and the rising joy was drowned in a passion of tears—tears from a fount that had never been opened since the days of his childhood; and even then, in the calm arrogance of his self-control, but rarely seen. They burst forth now, and were perhaps a healing spring—waters to cleanse the evils of the old nature, and bear them away.

When he recovered himself, he was a different being. He rose up, and went upstairs. He had submitted to Mr. Lee, because he felt he had no right to be with Amabel—she did not love him. Those she loved, surrounded her bed; but he who ought to have been nearer than all, was not loved, and could not be there. It was

otherwise now. She was his wife, and she loved him, and his place was by her side.

As he went up the stairs, there was hope in his heart. "God is merciful," his half-unconscious thoughts murmured; "He will not take from me my new-found treasure." And then, still almost unconsciously, his thoughts formed themselves into a passionate prayer. All these days, though in some sort a religious man—that is, a sincere observer of religion—he had hardly prayed. There was a dead oppression on his heart, even in the midst of its anxiety, that prevented prayer; a blackness over earth and Heaven. But now he prayed, as those pray the life of whose life is trembling in the balance.

This was as he walked up the stairs; when he entered the hushed corridor, despair again re-entered his soul. Soft as was his footfall, it was heard in the intense stillness, and Mr. Lee came to meet him. "No



change," he murmured, sadly, shaking his head ; " no improvement."

Lord Latimer drew a deep breath, and then, putting his hand on Mr. Lee's arm, said, in the same murmured tone, " I will watch by her."

Mr. Lee looked up with anxiety, and though asking nothing, there was an imploring expression in his countenance.

Lord Latimer answered the unspoken request.

" She is my wife—my own ! If she lives, she shall live to bless me ; if she dies, she shall die in my arms."

Mr. Lee gazed at him again, and saw that the man was changed ; saw that he might be trusted. They resumed their more rightful positions—Lord Latimer was the master of his own house, and his own wife. He took his seat by Amabel's pillow, and there watched for the night. They were hours that could not but be fruitful, if only

the thoughts had a right direction. And they were fruitful in Lord Latimer's mind, for they revealed to him himself.

As his eyes accustomed themselves to the dim light, he began to see the wasted features of the form beside him ; and as he gazed on them he asked himself whether he deserved that God should spare to him his treasure. It was an hour when conscience, if allowed to speak, speaks loudly. It was one of those moments when reparation for evil done is *almost* too late, moments which may give a foretaste of what conscience will be, when repentance for evils done is *indeed* too late. His thoughts went backward, and he began to dwell on the love and care he had bestowed on her. But conscience startled away that soothing reflection ; it asked, and in no soft tones, " Had he cared for *her* at all ? Had he studied her tastes ? Had he sought her pleasure ? Had he made his home *her* home—her wishes his wishes—her

hopes his hopes?" When once these questions were set forth, the whole of his life began to float before him in pictures, and the same picture was presented, turn where he would. There was himself; there was nothing besides.

The reflections became almost maddening; but he sat on, meeting them, enduring them, suffering them to take root. The nearness of death prevented self-defence; the anxiety of the mind made it dread to be anything but true; and so it was that he came to see himself as he was.

It was towards the dawn of day that there was a faint sound from the form that had almost seemed to cease to breathe. Holding up his hand with an attitude of command, Dr. Sutton, who had been watching all the night, rose and bent over Amabel. There was certainly an attempt at speech, but he could not catch the feeble sound. He had at intervals poured drops

of brandy on her lips, and he poured them now more freely, then watched again, gently opening a shutter to allow the dim light of the wintry dawn to enter in.

In about ten minutes the faint sound was repeated, and he fancied he heard the last words, "Latimer here?" He went round and touched Lord Latimer.

"Show yourself," he softly said.

Lord Latimer stooped over the pillow. Amabel's eyes unclosed, and "Forgive" was distinctly heard.

"My darling, my wife, my love!" he said, and at each fond word he pressed his lips on her brow.

Something like a smile crossed her features, and she turned her head aside and closed her eyes.

Dr. Sutton raised his hand again authoritatively to stay the approach of any other person, and to command Lord Latimer to his seat; and then once more they watched

in fearful stillness. The same thought was in each heart; they felt that in that one word "Forgive" the life had gone out.

After a time Dr. Sutton held a mirror before her lips, and saw that it was dimmed; in ten minutes more the long stupor of the night changed into a sleep, which became the sleep, not of death, but of life.

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Amabel lived, and Lord and Lady Latimer began a new life together. Into that new life we need not enter, except to say that it was different to the first life. To change a stubborn human heart in the least degree is a hard thing, whether that change be towards God or towards man. But if it is changed, a new life follows, as the flower follows the bud. To take away a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh, is a divine gift; but if the gift be given, the heart of flesh acts like a heart of flesh. The old nature is passed away, and the man is new.

This is sometimes considered a hard doctrine; it is even called cant. But it is, in fact, a simple truth, so clear that a child may see it. And thus it was that Lord Latimer became a different man.

The soil of his heart—for he had a heart—had been overlaid with stones, not weeds. There came to him that “tamer of the human breast,” adversity, and it pierced through the callous heap till the heart was reached; being reached, the soil was the same as that of other human hearts, and was able to push forth flowers and fruits in due season.

To Amabel that short episode in her life was not unfruitful. She too had learnt a powerful lesson. She had seen in herself an unsuspected evil—the power of vanity; seen it in a form she could never forget. Henceforward she could not but walk thoughtfully, and though the strong love she afterwards felt for her husband was perhaps

in itself a sufficient safeguard, it did not seem so to her. He who has been burnt fears the fire, and Amabel, amid the dangers of her youth, and the charm of an increasing beauty, bore about with her a humble and distrustful spirit, which, acting like a shield, turned from her the snare of the world's admiration, and, by God's grace, made it harmless.

THE END.





# MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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